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THE MISTLETOE



A GERMAN TALE

OF
CHRISTMAS

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THE MISTLETOE.





THE MISTLETOE:

A

GERMAN TALE OF CHRISTMAS.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "THE WEDDING BELLS,"

ETC., ETC.

" For Fable is Love's world, his home, his birth place—
Delightedly dwells he 'mong Fays, and Talksmans,
And Spirits; and delightedly believes
Divinities—being himself divine."

LONDON:

THOMAS ALLMAN, 42, HOLBORN HILL.

MDCCCXLVII.

PRINTED BY KNIGHT AND SON, UPPER HOLLOWAY.

THE MISTLETOE.



CHAPTER I.

"And noiseless as a lovely dream, is gone;
And was she there? and is he now alone?"

A TRUE undisguising narration of my life's first and chiefest adventures may amuse—must instruct you. Fancy me at the moment I introduce myself to you, twenty years old, and in the most blissful state of mind to which human events may possibly exalt one. Under the spell of that charming mixture of hope and certainty, retaining all the ardour, the eagerness, the excitement of the chase, with the content, the repose of heart attending undoubted success, or all but perfect assurance of success—and with just enough of uncertainty for the invigorating prospect of something to be achieved; fancy all this, and you have a faint idea of my heart's picture during that eventful journey upon which I first present myself to you.

It was winter.—I was travelling alone, through

one of our most monotonous pine forests, on the wings of hope, though by slow lagging stages. I was scarcely impatient of delays, my reveries so amply repaid me for their transient vexings.

They were to lead me to one I had not met since we were children together. My old playfellow, my sweet friend, my betrothed, such I considered her, my Juliet, mine alone.—“*Mine*,” I repeated to myself as I glided or jolted along, as the case might be—less of the first than the last. Yes, sweetest Juliet, everything conspired to prove that we were to be each other’s.

Our fathers were both professors at the University of which I had been, till now, the hope and ornament. Both might claim to be of good families; but each cared more for the interests of science than for such personal considerations—even though, in substantiating their pedigrees, they might have proved an unbroken descent from Rodolf of Hapsburg, or Charlemagne! This view of things more especially applied to my own parent, both from his higher claims of ancestry and his utter indifference to them. We were descended from the elder branch of one of the oldest and wealthiest Graffschafths of our empire, which for several generations had been enjoyed by the descendants of a younger son, by a second marriage; while the rightful heir was a poor professor.

Nothing, however, had gone prosperously with the usurping family: the sons had died off, and daughters had generally inherited their lands and wealth.

Some years back a singular adventure happened to us in relation to our forgotten claims. I was a boy at the time. My father one day received a mysterious visit from a superb lady, who proved to be the late countess; after which he appeared a little agitated for a season, though he shortly recovered his usual placid equanimity. What had transpired in the interview it was hard to elicit from one so exclusively absorbed in physical combinations as was my respected progenitor; but by degrees the following particulars were made out by his somewhat more matter-of-fact brother geologist. It seemed that the countess, who had become gloomy and misanthropic, from sudden remorse of the conviction of being a usurper of others' rights, had traced out my father for the purpose of making known to him the existence of a document that should prove the first marriage of their grandfather, and thus substantiate his claim to the earldom, but upon certain conditions, which she would impose upon my father. These he listened to with so much abstraction and indifference, that the haughty and violent woman, in a second meeting, wherein he absolutely refused one of her stipulations—viz., to abandon his profes-

sorship and pursuits—had torn the writing to shreds before his face, declaring that a pitiful discriminator of clays and sands should never inherit the fair woods and broad lands of Felstein. This last asseveration pointed at myself, who had unwittingly contributed to the catastrophe. At the request of the strange lady I was produced for her inspection; and led on, to my bane, by a parent blind in babyhood as his child, to display my infant erudition in the properties of shales and schists. The scene made a strong impression upon me at the time, and was afterwards revived in my mind by accidentally hearing of the death of her I had so unconsciously disgusted. It was Juliet's father whose strenuous endeavours had succeeded in chasing all the vague hopes that had then arisen in my mind. From all he could hear of the late countess's character, he had no doubt that the paper we had seen destroyed was, as she represented it, the only one of the kind in existence. There was therefore no hope, and being none, no doubt or perplexity about the matter.

Besides, my indefatigable friend had learnt, having made a pilgrimage to Felstein for the purpose, that the present countess—the daughter of her who had shown her haughty disgust of science, and scientific professorships, to be stronger than her scruples of conscience—would willingly have relinquished her

inheritance in our favour, had she known of any papers to prove the legitimacy of our branch. She was a recluse, said to be more misanthropic than her mother; and, secluded within her own domain, to pass her hours in religious meditation; while it was further added, that she had made a vow against all earthly ties, if not to end her days in a convent. Her only visitor was a favourite nephew, on whom she was said, notwithstanding her disavowal of mortal affections, to dote. Yet, though she prohibited all company, the persevering professor obtained an interview, when her generous offers amazed even his unworldly mind—though he thought proper to refuse as a concession what was claimed as a right.

This extinguishing certainty of the non-existence of any proof of our claims was, the philosopher declared, a great blessing; and by degrees the subject waned into insignificance, and ceased to be agitated amongst us.

My father, besides geology in particular, and science in general, possessed three ideas—one was his friend; the next, his son; the last, his friend's child. It is uncertain whether the last should not have stood first in the list; for her early development of a pretty enthusiasm for scientific investigation had called forth in Juliet's favour the most lively and demonstrated admiration he had ever

been known to display, and had since enchained an especial devotion; for, alas! in comparison with this scientific ardour the precocious promise of his son had proved as a body without a soul.

With all his abstractedness, my father was a warm friend, and had long silently cherished a hope of the future union of our families, though he had probably to this day never mentioned it—accidental allusions only proving that he had set his heart upon the match; allusions drawn from him by the force of events, of which his interview with the lady of Felstein was the first. It was then that the intimated reproaches of his more energetic friend for his conduct on that occasion had moved him to glance at hopes which, he added, could never have been realized had he agreed to the late countess's proposals. What these proposals were, Herr Mineralisch had only been able to guess at; but it was certain that my father's hopes and expectations were strong in proportion to their rare occurrence.

Neither Juliet nor myself had received any intimation of our proposed destiny up to the time of our parting eight years since, each of us being about twelve years of age. It was at that period that the professor Mineralisch proved more substantially than my poor father his claim of ancestry, by unexpectedly inheriting a small estate, situated on the farthest

confines of the forest through which I was now journeying. Had it been my father he would not have been persuaded to abandon his professorship and his beloved college, though the finest estate in Austria had invited him, as indeed he had proved; but Herr Mineralisch used all more moderately than his friend, who was consoled in part for his loss, by the prospect of a scientific correspondence, and the practical information he reckoned upon, to aid and illustrate his own profound theory, from Mineralisch's projected investigations within his new estate.

When I look back upon my ardent youth, the strange adventures and eccentric changes of that after-time, the smoothest spot of repose and calm is that occupied by the remembrance of the good Mineralisch: his warning smile and his guiding hand it was that moderated and directed the wilder and more dangerous flights of my unbounded thirst for knowledge; and his encouraging voice that recalled me from the region of self-torment, wherein I was an ingenious adept. He had never looked very sanguinely on the matter of the family alliance; but since his accession of fortune, he had recurred to it, with some complacency, once or twice in his letters to my father.

The time had now arrived at which it was agreed that Juliet and myself should meet, with a mutual

knowledge of our parents' hopes, though a choice otherwise to be unbiassed. My fair one had hitherto led a sufficiently secluded life, with the exception of the visitings of her father's brethren in science, who however arrived in tolerable succession. On the coming occasion there was to be a muster of as many friends as could be assembled—the old place was to be trimmed up for the celebration of Christmas, according to its lady's learned taste. Juliet might indeed have been a professor herself, from her deep erudition, especially in the science of fossil bones, and of the earth's structure; a professor indeed with a blythe, buoyant, cheery spirit, such as never yet attained any professional chair. My father worshipped her very idea; she was his pupil, the work of his hands, the sunbeam of his life, and after receiving one of her letters, elucidating most probably some phenomenon connected with the primary strata, and as hard as it, he would remain so long in wondering admiration, that one might have been apprehensive for the result, had not the dispatch been generally accompanied by some bone, or drawing, which reclaimed him from speculation, to the study of his specimen.

One word more, before I carry you along with me on my interrupted journey—a word upon an unworthy yet important subject, if I am to tell my

own story—myself. I was then fantastic, proud, fitful—the fault of youth, and too exalted an imagination; vain, but the indirect flatteries of the women encouraged me in it; led away by the impulse of the moment, and my own vivid fancy, into adventures—but I will not detain you on so profitless a theme. My father would shake his head in contemplating me, especially upon the comparisons that suggested themselves immediately after receiving one of Juliet's letters. But my father knew not what youth was; his had been a philosophic youth. He considered my geology superficial; but then he could never get over the consternation he had experienced upon my denying the absolute and ruling dominance of his pet, abstract Truth.

Instead of excusing the failings I had, I will rather mention one, of which I had then little idea even in others, and was wholly without myself. I had no self-interested thoughts, was open-hearted as the day; and if it never occurred to me to feel scruples on the score of Juliet's superior worldly position, it was my very unworldliness that made me disregard its advantages. In truth, the limits of our university town bounded my knowledge of society, and the ways of men. I had been a knapsack-carrying tour or two with a few of my companions; but these were through the wildest parts of the

country, in a route prescribed by the heads of the college for the pursuance of its crack science, the *furor* for which was mostly emulated by my fellow-students. I had seen few great towns, and little that could give me any appreciation of the importance of wealth, and the state and pomps of life. But I had read and dreamed of it all, surrounded by a halo surpassing truth; for I was—what for worlds I had not confessed—a poet, and it was only in fits that I descended heart and soul into this lower sphere. While I gave my mind to the investigation of matter, as a thing of duty, my soul dwelt in secret in unseen worlds. By a dear perversity, while I failed to be carried along by the mania of the many, I clung to the study of Ideas, and those labyrinths of abstract reasoning, that were looked coldly if not sarcastically upon amongst us, where the combinings, analyzings, collectings, were all of a tangible nature, to which each year added decided acquisitions which might be vainly hoped for in those unreal regions, whose boundaries had been traversed and retraversed in an unbroken twilight, which no new ray might pierce.

But to return to our worldly conditions. Had my father possessed millions, he had devoted them all to the interests of science, though I believe it would have occurred to him that his favourite little scholar,

my fair betrothed, would best carry out his design with it. Under the same circumstances Herr Mineralisch would, I am persuaded, have had no thought but for our mutual behoofs, and for science next after. This disregard of lucre, this freedom from self-interests, this inclusive friendliness, so imbued the social atmosphere, that I was scarcely in a case to perceive its merit.

And now hie for our journey! I was travelling with a state to which I had been unused; but besides the length of the journey, the forest way was so undiversified by villages, towns, or even hamlets, that a winter foot-traveller had often found himself in the position of the benighted heroes of my favourite National Story, without the advantage so courteously provided by the authors, of the sudden watchfire, or the single light in the solitary hut or castle. Unawares, I have touched upon my most favourite study—Ye elves and nymphs, that haunt the trees and streams of our romantic father-land, and the pages of our romantic literature—I confess to a mysterious interest—aye, even now a magic interest—in ye. I saw in ye the realized traditions of beings pure and bright that might still— But not now of ye. Why do I linger on this opening scene of my life's drama? Certes, we are prone to draw our breath on the threshold of coming wonders;

and this journey was as the key-stone of the bridge, spanning a smooth, fair-margined stream, but the bridge was doubtful and perilous;—a truce with this babbling. Well, it was winter, cold as the ideal of a winter, more icy in the forest; but that seemed an enhancement of my position, and set off my glowing thoughts, my fervid reveries of expected bliss with my Juliet, as did the antique silver frame of her looking-glass, the reflection of her beaming face. A hoar-frost hung upon the trees—a decided addition to the scene, that beautiful hoar-frost, so exquisitely delineating every twig and fibre with its fairy chrystals. Brightly green was the turfy path I traversed, fresh from the friendly gaze of the lofty sun-beams; while the vandyking of frost that lingered beneath the spreading branches on either side formed a border of white, heightening its sunned brightness. Then, ever and anon, there were fair openings breaking the stately monotony, showing long vistas, conducting to deep recesses of the forest, all fair and dazzling, like a bridal procession—such was the comparison suggested by the present state of my hopes and feelings. Now, in long straight rows, the tree-y *cortège* seemed trooping away, till it dwindled to the smallest speck; now gracefully undulating, it was gradually lost in vapoury meanderings. There were patches of fertile earth on which

grew the beech and the oak, whose bare arms and wild forms charmingly relieved the sameness of our endless evergreen pines—so much variety, too, the frosty garbing imparted even to their spiral formality; while ever and anon, a straggling sunbeam lent its beautifying ray, now through the leafless branches of one of those rarer species of forest trees, upon the twining wreaths of the parasitical plant it supported, forming a gemmed coronal worthy to be a bridal chaplet—the chaplet of the fairest fair, my fair, my Juliet. When could my thoughts wander from her!

Whatever scene I might idealize in that frosted forest world, the fair daughter of my father's friend was there in the midst—the heroine of the picture. I led her forth to the dance, amidst a gay group, whom all envied. I saw her fairy form at her harp, and could almost distinguish those tones made to dulcify the air. I followed her amongst the rocks, with her little hammer, and saw her eyes sparkle over some newly-found wonder. Brighter and dearer yet, she graced my home and me! I recalled her young form, her playful smile, her merry little laugh, speedily adding the womanly grace of form, the intenser depth to the darkness of her eye, as well as to the brightness of her wit, which time had developed. “Mine, only mine,” I repeated as the picture became more vivid, and I seemed to clasp

her small hand, best though most fragile of gifts, in mine; while those playful tones softened to the low sweet murmur of love; and we went gliding through life together. Ah, fair visions of a bliss so soon to be.—But I must on with my journey and my narrative, nor pause, nor linger further.

It was getting towards evening on the third day of my travels. All day had memory and imagination, with boundless perseverance, and greatly to their own satisfaction, been concocting an ingenious variety of scenes out of the same materials. Wearied out at length with their unresting activity, I had ceased to exercise due control over them, whereupon they shortly began to overstep the bounds of the real world, and to glide, without let, exertion, or discomposure, into the wondrous realms of a spirit-world of their own. In other words, I was in that dozing, half-dreaming state when imagination, undeadened by physical fatigue, escapes all material durance, and has all its own way, casting a spell over memory, and imprisoning each other faculty.

I was traversing flowery gardens and verdant *bosquets* in the kingdom of Gnomes, beneath the forest. Juliet was with me, describing it all, and conducting me through paths lit by a clear but subdued unearthly light; and she told me the whole of the subterranean region stretching under that

forest was hers by inheritance, as the lineal descendant of a Gnome prince, who had wedded a lady of her ancient family. I smiled, and called her queen Juliet—my queen; and then she plucked me flowers, but I found their foliage was of precious metals, and their blossoms of gems emitting no perfume—and my heart sunk, and I ventured to urge a preference for the upper air, an utter indifference to jewels, and a decided objection to perpetual twilight. But my Juliet pouted, then reproached my unworthy appreciation of a Princess, and Principality of the Primary Strata; and finally, when I turned from her, asseverated against me for wishing to quit her, and frowningly interrupted my appeal by murmuring her determination to compel me to remain, and for ever share with her the dreary splendours of her newly-acquired kingdom. Stamping on her granite soil with a force that made me start, she invoked the shade of the beautiful Ancestress, through whom she was the descendant of Gnomes; and Juliet, no longer amiable in my eyes, was no longer beautiful from the moment I encountered the deep thrilling orbs of her pale progenitress, in whose wondrous glance apparently resided the power of enchantment, for which she had been bidden forth, and which she sought to fling around me. Still I gazed and gazed, fascinated by that strange

unmoved glance, a fitly devised spell to keep me there bound, more powerful than the granitic barriers of my liege lady's inherited domains.

But as I looked, the spell was waning. Sleep at least had dispersed; for I woke with that start which the anger of Juliet had seemed to induce, but which indeed had originated in the sudden halt of my vehicle, and I found myself endeavouring to efface the vision of the piercing Glance by passing my hand across my drowsy lids; vainly, vainly—it yet persisted in confronting them. Yet was I awake, wide awake; but the more I became conscious to the possession of each faculty, the more actual and vivid was the impression that those earnest eyes were upon me. It was no delusion now; and still I feared, tremblingly feared, to dispel it; and intently gazing with every sense strung up to the extremest watchfulness, I forbore even to move from the reclined position that had lulled me to dream, and waked me to a reality surpassing every vision the most glowing fancy had ever before depicted, lest by stirring I should break or disturb, what it was scarcely possible to believe in as a palpable reality. “But, I dream not—she is actually there,” I murmured, as I stared on in entranced wonder. “But she—She cannot be real—if being connected with the world in the ordinary manner of mortals is ——”

“ I fancy it is vain to expect assistance or advice from this open-eyed dreamer, this concentrated type of the seven sleepers,” cried a shrill voice, proceeding from a mischievous merry face, that peered over above where sat the enchanting, or enchanted lady. With a vast effort I shook off the stupor of surprise that had possessed me; and, springing from the carriage, a single bound brought me to the feet of the wonderful Gnome princess; alert and aroused as might be, but more than ever convinced of the proximity of wonder and witcheries, more potent far than those framed by the disconnected fancy. I might now perceive the whole scene; all that formed the back-ground to the soul-beaming Eyes. The lady sat beneath an oak, her figure lit up by torchlight. The mocking face, adorned by a jaunty peasant cap, still laughed through the branches—surely some tricksy wood-nymph methought. She had gathered some green boughs, which proved to be of mistletoe; and after dropping them into the lap of her lady, jumped down, torch in hand, with an agility rivalling that of a youthful monkey, let alone a nymph or peasant girl, which last she resembled in every other particular. The torch-lit scene was a strange one, to which appearance my cloud-dropped aspect must have added. Another vehicle was there; and about it was busied a page,

bearing another torch, assisted by my driver, who it seemed had halted from curiosity, or good-nature. The lady, or whatever she might be, seemed to take the accident with much coolness, as did her nimble lady in waiting, or roguish Abigail. I now made offers of assistance, as collectedly as I might with the bewildering remembrance of my dream in my brain, and the earnest Glance, and that mocking laugh still directed towards me.

“The lady Mistel, my honoured lady, thanks you for your prompt and gallant offers of assistance, sir Student,” replied madam Malapert, vexatiously interfering, just as I thought the bright lips of her mistress were breaking into a reply. “You have slumbered and snored most perseveringly in our service,” added she; “and courteously forbore by any foolish meddling, useless advice, or scholarly harangue, retarding our active measures to repair the slight damage occasioned by your lumbering vehicle jolting up against our fairy coach. For like master, like man. Your charioteer was following your slumberous example, and so came against our civilized machinery, which we have been getting through the forest, and we were now returning from our harmless work of gathering evergreen for my lady’s bower.”

Let me pause to describe to you the wondrous

lady Mistel—such being her name—whom during this provoking attack I had full leisure to contemplate. Let me picture to you as she then appeared, her whom it was vain endeavouring to forget; the influence of whose glance alone was ever to me unequalled in its power to subdue, to excite, to disturb, or control. She was seated on the bank, whereon was spread her mantle of white fur, and was habited in an all-enveloping white garment, clasped or buttoned at the throat and wrists with large rubies, that gleamed in the torch-light. Her figure was rather bent forward, her chin lightly resting on her slender fingers. I could have told nothing of the form of her face, nothing but that it was dazzlingly fair, and of the eyes, those large clear fringe-circled orbs, which almost awed while they enchained me, by their piercing brilliancy; but then the mouth did relieve with its rose-tinted lips the colourlessness of the face; and as though to reassure my aching sense of wonder, those lips wreathed slightly upwards in acknowledgment of my address; while the contagion of the charmed smile extended to the eyes—and then—ah, then—even at that transporting moment, the wondrous white vision arose, and with her fair face and soft drapery, her rubies and her bright lips, looking like nothing more than a white cloud, dashed with the ruddy flashes of the evening sunbeam—

then, like a cloud, she glided past me, inclining her head as she did so. She was about to enter the coach; wildly I followed, eagerly tendering my assistance, which that arch climber, that wickedest of handmaidens contrived to prevent, by interposing herself and her aid, with surprising dexterity, and an amazing bound; thus cruelly and remorselessly cheating me of the golden opportunity of approaching and offering a courtesy I had given worlds to effect. That evil sprite, whose bitter accusations yet rang in my ear, employed herself next in loading their light vehicle, within and without, with the forest spoils her marvellous activity had achieved, ceaselessly chattering all the time in her clear, high voice, while giving her orders to the page and commending her own performance. Meanwhile, with words of explanation, and expressions of devoted service, I ventured to address her mistress, who yet bent her gaze upon me from the corner of the carriage where she reclined. I exulted to find I had regained my stunned senses, my powers of mind, for my eloquence had the effect of disturbing the unmoved glance of those steadfast eyes; they gradually drooped beneath my ardent words, the gleam of her smile was playing in their fringed depths, and the rosy lips were actually about to part, when that tormenting demon—had she been a bird, and her

neck approximate to my fingers, I pity her case—that aggravating clamberer, suddenly whisked by me, pushing me from the door as she did so, and closing it with a bang, all in an instant; then, seizing the whip and reins, she mounted the front of the carriage. Just as her fairy team were in readiness to start, she paused, and holding up her finger, turned towards me with “Soh, sir Student, the damage we have met, through encountering sleepy travellers in our usually lone forest, is repaired—our day’s task is done—many, many thanks; all the thanks that are your due, for so considerately allowing us to help ourselves out of our difficulty, to say nothing of helping us to it. Thanks for all the counsel and support you have offered to two lone *mādchens* in their need, and for all the rest of your various *prof-fers* of service. Manners and politeness must be gloriously and importantly regarded at the ——— University; of that we are assured from all we have this night seen and experienced, and I am sure *you* deserve the professorship!”

“The ——— University!” I cried, in wonder, yet half amused, spite of my agony of curiosity, at the odd manners of my tormentor, but beyond all anxious to lengthen any colloquy. “Our University would be honoured and enriched by your accepting the gymnastic professorship.”

“Ha, ha!” she shrilly laughed; “my small agility had been little needed had we earlier secured thy assistance for our expedition; so assured are we of thy lightness of limb, and promptness of wit.”

As she now threw herself back on her seat for the indulgment of the merriment inspired by her own sally, I once more approached the carriage, demanding in a low voice whether I might ever hope to see again the bright being it contained.

“Ah, ah! sir Student, are you there again?” interposed that malign one, popping suddenly up, like a punchinello; “deserting a lady who has condescended to hold you in conversation, for one who scorns to waste word upon your Geologyship. My service to you, courteous sir. We are off, and away at our utmost speed, whose most measured pace in comparison to thy snails’ movement, is as a shooting star to a school-boy’s squib; and for what thou askest about seeing us again—for seeing us again,” she slowly repeated,

“Thou shalt look for us vainly in hall and in tower,
Thy thoughts shall pursue us in mirth’s blytheest hour;
For the deep of the forest concealeth our bower.
Where the noblest and greatest pay court to the fair,
Mortal man! I defy thee to find such a pair;
And vain sighs shall escape thee—the search is—Despair.”

This she shrieked at the top of her voice, with her

head stretched towards me until the coach was whirled out of sight. While she had been repeating her mysterious rhyme, my attention was greatly distracted by observing the white hand of her lady rest for an instant on the ledge of the coach-door, with an action I had not mistaken; for on looking to the ground, just as the swift wheels began to move, I found dropped at my feet a spray of Mistletoe!

CHAPTER II.

"This mass of men forces me down to earth."

"MY DEAR KARL,

"BE not surprised at all I have to tell you ; or if you cannot help it, let your astonishment give way to satisfaction, when you learn the vast improvement that has come to our schemes of enjoyment. It all resulted from my arriving here to spend some days with a scientific friend of mine, with whom I got acquainted through starting a correspondence about the organic remains found in her fine domain, midway between the town of S—— and our old tumble-down place. She prayed me to come and see. I consented, and conquered ; for my lady countess, she is no less, finds there is no living without me. Though a very odd eccentric sort of person, detesting society and the frivolities of life, she is a woman of such liberal mind, that she would have all people take their own course as to what they deem the best good of existence. ' Life is so short,' she says, ' that before you have succeeded in persuading people to find good in your way, the

gusto of the search is withered.' In practical pursuance of her idea, it is not only the physical wants of her poor neighbourhood that she seeks to gratify, but, though averse herself to life's pleasures, she provides yearly fêtes for their amusement and benefit. Well, this winter she has besought your friend Juliet to superintend the revels, and further intreated that I should have some of my own for the entertainment of the great ones of the place. It is impossible to refuse her requests—they are commands to all who know her. In like manner, I have but to suggest, and my thoughts find themselves realized; have but to imagine such an one would be an addition to the fête, when lo! a special bidding is despatched; so that perforce I am prudent, and say as little as I can.

“Ours is a case of little variety with regard to acquaintances. They consist, as you know, of my father's scientific set, beginning with professor—and ending with student——. One we have got here with us, Henrich Brown, an Englishman. My father took a great fancy for him, he is so charmingly scientific. You know he is; and how instructive it is to hear him talk of the ‘age of Brachiopods,’ and the whole range of the Silurian; for you know that our University has the honour of numbering him amongst her students. He teaches us all the

old English customs of Christmas, though he is, to be sure, of the young England party, he says; and he tells us all about you; and, do you know, he assures me our darling geology is known and cultivated even in England, and that they have a Buckland and a Lyell fit to comment on Leibnitz, and to hold converse with our glorious Liebig. This subject brings me to the glory of this place, the noble field it affords for the pursuance of one's knowledge of the earth's crust. Beneath my own eye, canst believe such fortune! but it is true, Karl; under my own inspection was exhumed a perfect jaw-bone of a dear Iguanodon; and it is mine, as well as the imbedded impression of the webbed claw of that delightful amphibious eccentric, the Pterodactyle. Exult with me in this addition to my museum. Expect me with the morrow's dawn to fetch you from your inn, in one of the countess's coaches, or, as she will have it, my own. For I am mistress in this dear old castle, according to her good pleasure; and I promise you my guests have small chance of becoming acquainted with the real lady, who is engaged on higher matters. I am impatient for all the messages from my dear instructor, and you must be charmed with much I have to tell; and so with mutual anticipations adieu, Karl. Thy

“JULIET MINERALISCH.”

This characteristic missive awaited my arrival at the inn in the town of S——, a day's journey from my destination. This document may be compared to the cold glaring morning's light, breaking through the window-shutters upon the charmed dreamer, to reveal the common places of life, in lieu of the golden realms of fancy.

All trace of my forest vision was lost; and I, in all my restlessness, suddenly restored to earth—stayed in the flight I would have fain pursued, in search of that which had put all other thoughts to flight; stunned by what in its turn dispersed in a moment my soul's dream—the cold voice of duty—the iron call of honour.

Strange, incongruously strange, were the compound, if one should lay bare the secrets of heart and brain faithfully, unscrupulously; torturing to recall, humbling to detail, and, I am persuaded, as incomprehensible as indescribable. Yet, shall I confess it, I made a stand at the paramount place assigned to the forward young Englander, in Juliet's letter, he who had been found so deeply scientific. I was annoyed;—I, who—well, you think it absurd. I will henceforth leave being too particular.

True to her word, Juliet came—bright and beaming—all I had pictured her; but ah! the reality was less vivid than the picture. She was accompanied

by a studious boy, who scarcely looked up from the book he was attentively bent upon; and which, *en passant*, I perceived, to my disgust to be English—a description of ancient masques, etc. The youth proved to be the nephew of Juliet's countess, and the only remark he made was, as he looked up on a sudden, "I have decided—I will be the dragon."

"Ah," replied Juliet. Then turning to me, "Apropos to Wilhelm—what will you be, Karl? for know I have made up my mind that we shall all choose some character, and spiritedly sustain it during the Christmas time. I have chosen 'Green Holly!' Here is a list of others. 'What think'st thou of Robin Hood?'"

I took the paper she handed to me with indifference, fortunately a little irritation of feeling helped to animate me. "Here is a goodly list," I cried. "Friar Tuck, Maid Marian," I repeated contemptuously; "robbers, profane priests, errant ladies, and all the host of unmeaning mimes and antics of a barbarous saturnalia. The legends of our fatherland offer ——."

"Hold your prompt patriotism, Karl. We are liberal as science itself; choose as you will from our own land of fable and faëry."

"I was but about to urge their higher meaning. There is a moral, an abstract truth,"—I checked

myself, or rather an overpowering remembrance froze the words upon my lips. Rallying my spirits, I exclaimed with forced impressement, "But how is Juliet to represent anything so ideal as the said green holly?"

"By being very sharp and prickly, especially against any check to her plan of entertainment," she replied. "We have a genius of a tailor at the castle, provided with bales of silks and stuffs, to make the dresses to our fancy. You must settle about yours before to-morrow. Then we have a little artist, whose ready pencil at once embodies our conceptions. She is but a peasant girl, whose merit my lady countess discovered and fostered, as she does all other sort of merit. Is it not so, Wilhelm?" The boy merely bowed, scarcely looking up. The book seemed to entertain him greatly, for a smile would ever and anon play over his downcast face, but not once did he communicate the matter of his mirth.

In eulogiums on her friend the countess, animated descriptions of her expected fête, intermingled with covert assurances that I should bless the day I came to join their revels, we arrived by the evening at Juliet's castle, which did not, as from her roguish manner, I had more than once imagined it might, prove a castle in the air. We were to pass the

night here, Juliet said, and pursue our journey to her home by the morrow's daybreak.

The youngster sprang from his seat, and I handed Juliet out as in a dream, from which I was startled by the cordial voice of Herr Mineralisch. "Welcome, my boy; welcome, my dear Karl," he said; "Juliet thought to lighten your dreary way, by providing pleasant company for the last stages, and considerably concluded you must be desirous to see a place of which we have had so much talk in former days; and who knows but what fortune may yet be just! who knows! But at all chances, welcome, my dear Karl, to your old ancestral Felstein."

The look with which I received this sally probably frightened the good professor—half vacant, half bewildered, as I suppose it might be. I know I felt as you may fancy a man would, who is making up his mind to a series of bewilderments, yet is but faintly impressed by them, or anything else of a sublunary description. I gazed around for Juliet, but she had skipped off with young master Studious; and, on turning again to my old preceptor, my appealing glance called forth a succession of soothing assurances that they had merely wished to provide an agreeable surprise; to gratify the curiosity I must naturally feel to view one of the oldest and

finest castles of Germany—a domain which had been the former theme of so much speculation and interest; and for his sportive allusion to my obsolete claims, he had never misgiven as to how his old sensible pupil would understand that. I hastened to reassure my kind friend on the score of my old ambitions, concluding by remarking that I had seen the important deed destroyed with my own eyes.

“Yes, yes, my boy,” rejoined the professor, quickly; “but my allusion pointed not that way. I never contemplated your coming to eject our lady countess by the strong arm of force; but—but there is, you well know, an influence—quiet, gliding, yet all-powerful.”

My simple man of science checked himself; and in piercing the transparent depths of his mind my own was calmed. I easily concluded that it was my union with the protégée of the recluse countess through which I was to share the goods and honours of Felstein’s future heiress.

“I must confess,” I said to Juliet that evening, as she introduced me into the lofty picture gallery, which she had had brilliantly illuminated, as she told me, to light me amidst my ancestors, “I must confess that though I have to thank you for this introduction to their ancient home, yet I feel rather an intruder than at *home* amongst them.”

I had recovered much of my equanimity, but I felt a little outraged at the mystery perpetrated against me. We had not previously seen much of Juliet, for her friend the countess was indisposed, and she had been consoling her, she said. "The countess is aware of the arrival of my father's former pupil," she proceeded; "and is but too glad to know that we are joined by so dear an old friend;" and with this, as though to make the amend for her plotting, Juliet, or I fancied it, slightly pressed my hand, as she directed my attention to one of my pictured forefathers; which pressure I—I think, I returned, and said mechanically something beginning or ending with "my loveliest." At that moment I perceived there was another person present—a woman seated on a low stool was engaged copying the portrait of a youth in a very quaint but rich costume.

"Art thou there, my child?" said Juliet, bounding towards her, and patronisingly laying her hand on the artist's shoulder as she was about to rise; "going on with that dear Albert Durer, and taking advantage of our lighting up. That is good, nor would I disturb you for worlds. Behold," she added, addressing me, and pointing to the portrait that hung before the young painter; "Behold him, I would have you portray—in costume I mean—Sigismond, count of Felstein, gallant

in war, powerful in debate, but weak and womanish about the heart, 'tis said; for which we may read, "constant in love." His story I will tell you another time."

"I should like much to hear it."

"Ah, poor Sigismond!" half laughed, half sighed Juliet, bounding off to some other favourite picture.

But while Juliet's hand had rested on the artist's shoulder I perceived it tremble. "She loves me!" I mentally sighed. "Dear affectionate girl, her heart has never wandered from the remembrance of her old playmate, and that attachment is now confirmed; whilst I—My coldness and abstraction has pained that young tender heart. But no—I will cast away this oppressive remembrance; seize a real good, rather than pine for a delusive vision. A delusion," I strenuously repeated;—"ah, forget; be restored to thyself, beating heart!"

My self-lecture was interrupted by Herr Mineralisch coming to the relief. "A goodly race," he remarked; "you have before numbered poets, and even philosophers and men of science amongst your ancestry—names one may be proud of. Well, I yet consider there is a chance for you, if not of establishing your noble descent, of reaping the fruits of it. Suppose now, our lady Abbess should cheat the cloister, and for the love of justice, or of Karl, com-

bine the contending interests by uniting the hands of the two last descendants of the ancient family—her own with yours; there would be an act equally just, generous, and spirited.”

“ Ah, a notable scheme!” I laughed.

At that instant I heard repeated, or my ears were deluding, as my other senses, “ Just and spirited she will prove.” Ah! who spoke? Juliet was too far off; yet I flew to demand if she had been the speaker. With unfeigned surprise she received my question, or my manner of putting it. “ Why, Karl—what a strange Karl have metaphysics, or poetic imaginations, made of thee! What hast thou heard, or what have they made thee fancy thou heardst?” she exclaimed. “ By thy looks, one might think one of the portraits had found voice, and addressed thee. To be sure, the gallery has been said to be haunted; but that is in the dark, or by moonlight.”

“ I thought I heard your father’s words distinctly repeated; but of course I was deceived, it was fancy. Things that strike one as very strange, one repeats sometimes to one’s self; the absurdly impossible sense evaporating in the process, and the words more forcibly impressed in consequence, so that the ear rather than the memory seems to distinguish them.” I believed my own explanation, and thought

no more of this. Ah ! what had I given as easily to have thrown aside another delusion ! I longed, yet dared not mention my forest encounter. With my half impression of *her* spiritual nature, I yet dreaded such sportive suggestion from the sarcastic and sceptical. More than once, and by various prefatory modes, was I on the point of introducing the ever-present theme. My courage sank ; and my sensitive conscience shrunk from raising the suspicious doubts of Juliet. Urged at length by my own, I finally found myself plunged into the wondrous detail, in outlining terms, measured and concise as I could assume.

“ You must have been dreaming, my boy,” said the professor, coolly, when I had come to the end of my adventure.

Juliet could fit the strange pair neither far or near, though she swept the wide neighbourhood for the purpose ; and, in the end, murmured, with a lurking smile, something about the inevitable result of the indulgment of a poetic temperament. The boy, who had not entered into any conversation, so that I had almost forgotten his presence, had, during my narration, looked suddenly up from his book, with suspended breath, and kindling cheek, while his young eye dilated with the eagerness of interest. His book no longer chained his attention ; and while the

others, in adverting to different subjects, seemed to think no more of the unimportant matter, he at once exclaimed, "Herr Karl, she you saw must have been the Child of Zara's oak, the nymph Mistel—the beautiful and most bewitching nymph, who is said to seek but never to have found constancy on earth."

"Tush, tush!" cried the professor, with good-humoured contempt. "Sir youngster, thou art little aware that Karl, though he sits there looking so moustached and manly, is quite half-disposed to credit those goblin tales with which thou hast done nothing but cram thy malapert brain during the three lustres of thy mispent life; especially if anything like sentiment, or, as they have it, an under-current of "the Eternal and the True," may be squeezed from out their fanciful forms. And, Karl, thou deemest not that that so seeming studious rogue is more than half a convert to every *diablerische* tale, simply as his impish nature congenializes him with every wild legend, every freakish fancy, that was ever coined in the distempered brains of our German dreamers. My child has charitably taken him in hand in the demonstrable sciences, in hopeful trust of a counterbalance to his absurd passion for monstrous imaginings. But for you two, Karl and Wilhelm, I warn you of each other, that is all."

“And in proof that the inestimable teaching of my profound, and never to be sufficiently respected instructress, Mademoiselle Juliet, has not been totally thrown away, see here!”—and, with the utmost gravity, the boy produced the book, over which he had been, or had seemed, so exclusively absorbed. It was opened at a page of illustrations, showing a landscape country wherein mortal lungs might never breathe, but where the wondrous beings of a pre-human world disported their reptile hugeness, in marshy damp, with seeming satisfaction as great, and with wanderings as unbounded as those where-with Juliet and her fellow-geologists revel therein. Juliet’s bright eyes sparkled with gratification, as she proceeded further to illustrate, for Wilhelm’s edification, the whole generations of earlier worlds, the forerunners of this recent era; and also to give a general outline of the succession of extinct creatures, that of old tenanted the earth’s changing surface; direct ancestors, if we may imbibe the vast truth, of the generation so advanced as to find it all out.

“That is good,” said the pleased professor; “if Herr Henrich were here, a succession class of science might be illustrated; but where we might place thee, Karl, I am at a loss to know.”

“Continue still in your doubts, my dear master. I fear they are more favourable than the certainty

may prove. But, if I mistake not, our young friend's studies e'erwhile were not so profitably bestowed as at present."

"Your pardon, good sir," quickly rejoined Wilhelm, with a sort of smile that made it difficult for me to resume again that same patronising manner. "If you allude to the English book, I was employed equally well over that, for that also was at the bidding of my learned and condescending teacher."

Shortly after this, the professor and his daughter retired, and Wilhelm and I were left to ourselves. Notwithstanding my preceptor's warnings, I at once turned to my young companion, with a request for an elucidation of his hints concerning the nymph of the forest.

"Ha! are you there again," answered my young gentleman, turning his head from me, with a gesture peculiar to himself; though whether now to conceal a smile, or suppress a yawn, I was at a loss to decide: Time wears on, but I am not much wearied by my unremitting studies, and I will endeavour to collect my recollections to do justice to one of the most curious of the many legends attached to the old place. But I see no reason why our watch should not be cheered; and, as you are not a slave to the inspiring weed, and I have abandoned its beloved fumes, since Mademoiselle Juliet was pleased to dis-

approve thereof, it would not be amiss if we besought her presence. Though, in her profoundness, she despises fiction, yet in this case she is aware, that not to know the tale is to be in ignorance of a feature of the place—an important influence on the peasant neighbourhood.” And, with an off-handness I never gave him credit for, the youngster hastily scrawled a few lines, and proceeded to have them dispatched to his lively instructress.

While I was speculating on the result of the unexpected bidding, I said, “Thou hast ventured rather far with thy lovely and learned preceptor, whom I had hitherto considered a rather stern taskmistress to thee.” Wilhelm darted an odd sort of glance at me from his large meaning eyes, “so that I had begun to apprehend for my future.” I concluded, throwing myself back on my chair. Again was the boy’s head turned away with meaning equivocal. “A strange youth this,” thought I. When he had first touched upon what Mineralisch declared to be his favourite theme, his enthusiastic tone and look had greatly attracted me; yet, notwithstanding his studious habits, I divined a covert waggishness, which at times I found a little discomfiting. At this moment Juliet actually entered, merely nodding to Wilhelm, and quietly taking her seat.

“ Friend Karl,” said he, “ and you, kind Juliet, are both about to prove exemplary listeners.”

There was something decidedly pert in this familiar imitation of my own address to him, to which the measured tone, and grave accompanying look, formed the only counterbalance. Leaning back in his chair, and fixing his eyes on me, he began without further preface.

CHAPTER III.

" The intelligible forms of ancient poets,
The fair humanities of old religion,
The power, the beauty, and the majesty
That had their haunt in dale, or piny mountain,
Or forest, by slow stream, or pebbly spring,
Or chasms and watery depths ; all these have vanished !"

THE tale is told of a former Count of Felstein, an ancestor of the lady of the castle, my good aunt—alas! not of my own; my relationship is only on the father's side. The young Count, at eighteen years of age, is said to have been a youth much like other youths, fond of every game, attached to each manly sport; particularly given to loiter his time away in rambling about the country with a favourite dog, but singular in his predilection for the loneliest depths of our forest. The trees he would climb like a young squirrel; and remain for hours, perched up amidst their branches, looking at the sky through his leafy canopy, or carving his name on their aged trunks, or plucking the leaves and twigs, and strewing them around, with an unoccupied restlessness not to have been expected. But though of such active habits,

the Count was, upon the whole, unsociable, and was often heard to sigh, no one knew what for. People speculated, of course; some said it was from vacancy; the more romantic hinted of the mysterious, undefined yearnings of the young heart, boding ill of it.

One fine day, he was lounging in his favourite attitude along the trunk of an oak, the oldest in the forest, bare, withered, and leafless; but within which grew, and greenly flourished, one of those parasitical encroachers called a Mistletoe. The poor old tree offering no pastime for his active fingers, the Count amused himself, in his listlessness, by plucking off, one by one, the white transparent berries of the evergreen, and pitching them farther and farther away from him. He was thus occupied, when he thought he heard a rustling in the dried leaves that lay strewn around the tree's roots; and, on looking up, he perceived a woman, of care-worn aspect, approaching. At the same time his dog gave a strange kind of moan, and forbearing even to glance at what displeased him, turned tail, and was seen no more that day by his master, as he made direct for his home at the castle, where his solitary return caused much disturbance.

The Count's strange visitor, though neither old nor yet supernaturally beautiful, had none of those wrinklins or markings of the features which tell of

the progress of time's car upon mortal brows; and though the unmistakable impress of years and sorrow had seared each lineament, and bent her fine form, each were cast in a more perfect and regular mould than ever belongs to the children of earth. Surprised, but perfectly undaunted, gazed the youth.

"Forbear, Count of Felstein," she said, with a musical intonation of stern pathos, and bending her brows with an evident hope of intimidation. "Forbear!—seek some employment more fitted to thy high birth, and thy years, than despoiling the darlings of our ancient race. Childish as is thy unseemingly trifling, the effect to us is direful, even in proportion to its inane silliness. But, woe is me; of all the immortal denizens of the forest, I alone am doomed to know the anguish of parental bereavement. My sisters pine through anger and annoyance of thy boyish sport; while I—know Sir Count, that at every berry plucked by thy wanton fingers, I suffer an anguish of heart and brain undreamed of by the most ingenious devisers of human tortures.

"Poor ladies! unhappy mother!" said the Count, really shocked, though receiving the wonderful announcement with the coolness of manner usual with him; "what a pity some of you didn't think of mentioning it all before—if indeed it be all true."

“ True, Count of Felstein !” repeated the dame, haughtily. “ Ah, thou mayst hence guess my repugnance to this interview—my hatred of mortal presence.”

“ Flattering,” murmured the Count.

“ Having overcome it,” proceeded she, unobservant of his interruption, “ Zara of the forest will further unfold the history of her race, if the wayward stripling who has intruded on their haunts can summon sufficient patience to listen.

“ Say on,” was all the reply the Count deigned.

“ We are an immortal sisterhood,” she at once began, “ whose life, whose atmosphere, is only in the wood and the forest. As man advances and overspreads these our realms, tenaciously as we cling to our leafy favourites, whose atmosphere is our life, repaid by the carefulest tendance on our part, yet the breath of human civilization so fades and attenuates us, that we should wane to impalpable essences were we not scared away, in time to renew our shrinking frames in deeper, shadier solitudes, where we slowly recover that vigorous sense of life and health, to which a material, sensuous vesture is indispensable. Should we, through indiscretion, irrecoverably lose it, we never cease to pine the loss.

“ Our life is one of unmixed content, consequently not of pleasure and pastime alone. To the restless

children of passion and pride, it may seem one of pitiful excitement; but the constant care of each leaf, and bud, and fibre, the emulative skill displayed by each of us on her loved nursling, is our work, our pleasure, our daily occupation, pursued with the intensest interest. And who shall say that this spiriting is triflingly bestowed? Not the children of men, whose arts and luxuries are mainly connected with the objects of our care. Painting, instruments of music, gorgeous carvings, and brilliant hues;—but the wonders unfolded to our spirit orbs surpass a thousandfold the most intricate inventions of mortal ingenuity! The tiniest bursting flower, the sap dispersing through a single leaf;—let your men of science say, if aught of their combinations equal these? And for art, our life is poetry embodied. The dimmest nook of the forest, seen through our eyes, is a painting, more perfect than mortal eyes can compass; our voices are music; and the lightest airs as well as the fiercest gales that stir the forest, our ever-varying orchestra, tuneful exceedingly for us. We are ever happy, and always young.”

She paused; and the Count, who had listened to all the previous narrative with deep attention, never removing his looks from the noble features of the superhuman speaker, now cast down his young eyes,

abashed at the unblushing falseness of the last statement, "Young and happy!" It was too clear his strange visitor was neither one or the other. But young as he was, he was too versed in the ways of man, or rather, some will say, of woman, to hint the unpalatable fact.

"Always happy," she resumed, in an altered tone, "so long as we are wise." Again a pause; while a visible struggle passed across her features—"Boy," she groaned, "thou art not the first mortal that has penetrated thus far into the forest, and into our mysteries. She who addresses thee holds not parley for the first time with your race; and the life she has been depicting, the life of passionless content, is *thus* no longer hers." The touching rich voice trembled, and, for an instant, the speaker, or singer, turned away; but shortly recovered her dignified composure, and recommenced. "About a century ago, a young knight visited these wooded recesses. He was of a beauty, and commanding presence, which I suppose has now passed from earth;" and, as Zara glanced at the pale young Count, the inference was far from complimentary to him. "I must tell you," proceeded she, "that I was speculative and unsocial, so far most unlike my sisters; and indeed a tradition ran amongst us that our strength was in unity. I was lucklessly doomed to prove

the saying. In one of those favourite solitary rambles, I chanced to meet the knight I told you of. An unwonted sensation took possession of me. I seemed to have found what I had so long sought, and — Suffice it, he wooed, and won me! And for a season we were happy; but his restless impatience for adventure, and for the scenes of human strife, came upon him, came to mar the scene of bliss. Our happiness was fitful, though it yet showed gleams of exquisite brightness. I taught him the secrets of nature, and her marvellous workings in the forest; he seized it all with avidity, but in vain. He grew wearier, and finally abandoned me;—rushed into the exciting hazards of ambition, the whirl of pleasure—of worldly excesses—and *then* was lost to me for ever!

“My sole consolation was the child he left to me. The darling of the forest, my bliss and my bane—my fair, my gentle, lovely Mistel. But alas for the penalty of my earthly love! that the freshness of my spirit was seared, together with the springy litheness of my nymphly form, I grieved not for that, but my child, my Mistel!—Though inheriting perpetual youth, she seemed hedged around by a thousand risks—inherited through her mortal parentage—her immortality subject to fearful contingencies. Beneath one of these unseen dangers, she now all

unconsciously trembles. Her breath is about to ebb; and it is thou that threatenest her harmless life. From that tree, now the couch of thy listlessness I first emerged, when light first broke upon this forest. It is called Zara's oak. As long as our parent tree abides, we abide near, and solicitously tend it; but for my child, her very existence is mysteriously bound up with the fragile plant that sprung from the oak at her birth. When the last berry shall be wantonly torn from the mistletoe, I shall be childless!"

Again Zara paused to still the anguished heart and voice. "Thy incursions," she went on, "have long scared away my sister wood-spirits, who, since my sad story, dread nothing so much as a human footstep. I alone, ever unhappy, have been forced to remain near, since this tree has been selected for thy pastime, judge with what feelings; and then judge of my inclination to obtrude myself into thy presence, when I can have so long forborne parley with thee—thee through whom the life of my heart's darling is ebbing before my eyes."

Shocked beyond measure, though yet incredulous of such dire effects of his idleness, the young Count promised for the future, to regard Zara's oak with the extremest reverence. Zara would exact more—and to her earnest pleadings he further assured her

that not only during his life should no rude hatchet, no spoiliating intruder infest that part of the forest which was within his territory, but that he would make every effort that such decree should be held sacred by his heirs for ever. The fine eyes of his listener shone with triumph, till the Count continued, in his languid placid tones—"All this I promise, upon one condition—that you allow me a glimpse of this peerless pet of the forest, that you bid your fair daughter forth to ——"

"Never!" impetuously interrupted Zara, her face gleaming red with anger—then growing paler than ever through apprehension.

"What other assurance may I have that all you have been telling me is no fable. I would but view the fair Mistel pass along the sward. It is the single, the only concession I will receive."

Impatiently the dame waved her head and hand.

"Farewell, then, lady of the forest," he said, beginning to dismount from his favourite aërie; "Zara's oak you may be sure will henceforth be sacred to me."

"And thou wilt enforce the latter part of thy promise, noble youth!" insinuated Zara.

"Why," answered the Count, as he leisurely descended, "the thing will be hard, if not impossible to compass; and your indifference about it

will be no great incentive to one so inert as myself overooming a difficulty. Good morrow, madam," and he was moving, with determined strides, away.

"Stay!" said Zara; and made another earnest appeal, to which the Count only replied, "Let me see the young lady, and so, and no otherwise, shall I be certified that the tale is all true."

"Count of Felstein," cried Zara, her eyes lighted with scorn, and drawing her figure to its supernatural height, "it is only the children of men that lie. Ah, ever fickle and unstable race, firm only in falsehood, why do I stoop to beseech ye!"

"Thou wilt prove that I am firm," said the Count, growing cooler to the threatening aspect of Zara. "Once more, show me the girl, or I am gone;" and it was clear that he was casting aside ceremony, as he discarded patience.

"Why should I have put this story upon thee, Count?" gasped Zara, no longer imperious. "Why wouldst thou descend to barter thy noble concessions?"

"Thou mayst be a witch. Farewell."

"But one moment, Count," she groaned.

The Count faced round, and stood like a stone awaiting her decree, while, awed by his determination, she fixed her eyes on him, whose gentleness she had read as weakness. A fearful struggle was

going on in the heart of the unhappy mother. "The case is different—how different!" she murmured. Not so dull was the youth, as not to guess that the process by which she sought to still her apprehensions was something unflattering to his vanity; but he bore it quietly.

"Thy hand to the bargain," she sadly murmured, "repeating thy promise the while."

The Count stretched forth his hand, which the sorrowing nymph lightly touched with her cold slender fingers, as he repeated his promise, taking care to add the condition.

In another instant, e'er he was aware of it, a young fairy form appeared, as suddenly and unaccountably as had her predecessor, and passed like a vision before him, turning her head as she did so. Ah, that turn of the head! momentary in itself—it turned the Count's for good and all. It did the whole business. Her charming figure did it almost; but her glance! it was the most fascinating mixture of her spirit and mortal natures you can imagine. Her features were of that lovely mould, imagined and raved about, but never seen in the daughters of earth; but it was that winning look of sweet, confiding gentleness, the crowning charm to the most attractive of mortal maidens, that touched and sounded the heart's depths—deep, deep, into our

young Count's heart was its softness distilled. The solid earth seemed giving way beneath his feet, and his soul winging its flight to hers. An exclamation was bursting from his lips, and he half-bounded forward, as the exquisite head was turned for a second look. At that moment Zara's tall figure interposed. She was bidding him a courteous farewell, of which the previously collected youth heard no word—his hand was raised to his throbbing head, and his eyes fixed on vacancy. The Count and Zara were alone.

“Tell me but that thou art satisfied,” asked Zara.

The bewildered boy repeated the word, “Satisfied!”

“Satisfied that no fable has been imposed upon thee, Count, about our immortal race,” concluded she.

“Perfectly,” he replied at length, with a mighty effort; and the young Count of Felstein turned away with a step that never after regained its boyish lightness.

“Satisfied!” he exclaimed to himself, “satisfied that yonder form of light is not of earth's mould. Oh, too, too surely;” and, exhausted with the hurried pace in which he had sought to expend his overcharged feelings, the accelerated beating of his agonized heart, the young Count—he the placid, careless sporter of a few hours since—threw himself upon the green sod, and wept.

“ Oh,” says one old chronicler; “ oh, wondrous spark of love !”

Need it be told that this was not the last time the Count saw the fair Mistel. You, who doubtless understand the arts and wiles, with the dauntlessness, the patience, yet the impetuosity inspired by the spell, which the boy Count so suddenly found cast around him, must be sure of the fact. You can imagine, too, the after sighs, the weary seekings, the despair, the hope renewed, and lastly crowned with success. For love has a wondrous power of finding what it seeks. Then came stolen interviews.

Did not the sorrowing matron of the forest interfere? Ah, sternly, strenuously; but in vain! She could not control the unfettered spirit-nature of her child; but her influence was great, and was successfully exerted in keeping the lovers asunder, until Mistel's filial obedience was well nigh proving fatal. And too well fitted was Zara to comprehend the nature of her all-engrossing sentiment; and soon she perceived that the mortal admixture in the being of her unhappy child was attaining a sad pre-eminence; and she knew that there was but one alternative to seeing the pining form waste away before her eyes, and then Zara gave her sanction that her gentle child should resume the exercise of her ethereal will.

Need I say that the first act of her recovered freedom was a visit to the despairing Count? Judge of his ecstasy at sight of the dear lost one; pale, through absence from him, yet bright as a moon-beam. How touching was the languor of her erst spirit-light nature! The Count informed her he should never survive such another absence, and fervently implored her again and again to unite her fate to his.

Now, Zara well knew that should her child yield to the Count's importunity, in becoming his bride, she would henceforth be subject to every ill assailing mortality, and virtually forfeit the ethereal nature inherited through herself. Numerous were the ills that had already assailed poor Mistel—here was the worst danger of all. The watchful care of her mother, whose life had been long a series of agonizing apprehensions, had hitherto preserved her semi-immortality; and, aware of the fruitlessness of open opposition, Zara now determined to meet the evil by strategy. Trusting to time and her experience of human inconstancy, she put it into her daughter's mind to prove her lover's truth, by pledging herself to be his at the end of three more summers, on condition that no more than three clouds of waning love, or doubts, or jealousy, should come athwart their hearts' union during that time of trial. How

happy, how grateful was Mistel. For the Count, he was forced to yield. Mistel's filial reverence was only equalled by her tenderness and love. They both smiled at the conditions. Clouds over such a heaven as their love !

And now would the sweet one haunt the grove, and garden paths, around the castle of Felstein ; in course of time would flit even along its stately galleries and arched corridors, where the Count would linger out the glowing sunsets, and the long moon-lights, by the side of his enchanting betrothed. On these occasions her appearance was that of a peasant maiden of the neighbourhood, as far as costume could disguise the sylph proportions of her delicate beauty. The singular laws of her being permitted Mistel to breathe unharmed amidst mortal haunts. Zara began to tremble, all had gone so smooth and cloudless between the lovers.

At length, as you may fancy, whispers of most opposite and distorted forms began to spread and circulate. The Count's continued celibacy was unsatisfactory, especially to the fair daughters of the surrounding nobles ; and his misanthropy was generally displeasing. On one hand, there were gibes about the peasant favourite, that so entirely engrossed the lord of Felstein ; on the other, he was said to be the weak dupe of a beguiling spirit, or

of a cheating imagination, inducing him to believe in a well-acted piece of chicane. Some said, "Poor Count," and pitied; others sneered, and used bitterer terms. Ah, poor Count of Felstein! It was long e'er he began to be advised of all this buzz about him. In the first ardour of his feeling, life was an absorbing dream; all beyond had fallen impressionless as the passing ripple on the sky-reflecting stream. The dream was lovely as ever, but the Count was nearly three years older—some of the world's wisdom had come upon him, and he had become jealous of its insinuations, sensitive of its judgments.

Mistel perceived his growing trouble, and, in an unguarded moment, extracted all its occasion from him.

She received the hesitating avowal with a smile of calm indifference, bordering on contempt; for the forest nymph cared naught for the world's thoughts, and was wholly without the sensitiveness to opinion of mortal maidens. She would have forgotten it all, had she not observed that the Count's disturbance did not decrease. On further explanation, though she could not comprehend why he should grieve on her account, she could easily conceive that the self-banishment of her dear Count from the society of those who deemed themselves

his equals might be considered an injury, a misfortune which disappointment might well entitle them to resent; and she unhesitatingly advised him to give a series of entertainments to the disaffected, that should drown all disgusts in hospitable revelry. This piece of counsel was prompted by the all-wise Zara; for Mistel herself, with her half spirit, half mortal nature, was as unwitting of the world's modes, as of elfy cunning; though quick to perceive, as innocently credulous. As yet she knew nothing but how to love!

The guests came to the castle of Felstein. Revelry sounded from the long-silent halls. Secure in love, Mistel would have been content to withhold her visits from the domain during the period of festivity, certain that her Count would seize the first opportunity permitted by the claims of his guests to seek his love. But, wrought upon by her mother, through the means of her affection, her curiosity, and love of frolic, she would appear, safe in numbers, at the next evening's banquet and ball.

She wore her usual robes of white, which the ethereal fingers of nymphs are skilled to weave from the fibrous barks of a certain tree with inconceivable delicacy. The single addition to her accustomed attire were the bright jewels which the undaunted Zara had cajoled from the fierce dwarfs of a neigh-

bouring mine, whose dwelling only her unbounded wisdom could trace, her indomitable spirit venture to approach. These she adorned her daughter withal. Then she got her friend, the chief dwarf, Eck, to construct a coach of gold for her, and harness the fleetest steeds to it.

When he and a brother dwarf brought it to her, they asked her with a smile on their little withered faces, how her carriage would be driven? This, too, she had calculated upon. Mistel, in her full costume *de fête*, was bidden forth to be introduced to them. After allowing time for their admiration, Zara produced two perfect little dresses, upon which, assisted by the obliging nymphs, and by the stores of the silkworm, her indefatigable skill had been busied of late. One of the costumes was that of a tiny, but lordly coachman; the other, a sumptuous guise, as for a very small old lady; a few words sufficed to explain the scheme to those sly elves, apt at all tricks, superhumanly alive to mischief, and conversant, too, with mortal trapperies. Loud and long were their shrilly shouts of approval; and overcome by the cleverness of the mother, or the innocent glee of the daughter, or else by the prospect of adventure, they agreed to all Zara proposed; and, in a very short time, Eck, the tallest and principal dwarf, was, by the aid of high-heeled shoes, and

costume to match, seated the very model of a shrivelled dame of fashion, by the side of the bright Mistel; while, perched upon the coach-box, his brother sprite soon taught the luckless steeds what it was to be driven by a member of the most irascible, testy, spiteful race over or under the earth. They had not proceeded in this state far, when Mistel, turning to her companion, begged that they might halt by a certain elm tree, bordering the castle domain. "For," said she, "I have just remembered me that I had best not appear amidst that people in my usual form; for, know that, upon my first visit to my betrothed husband at the castle——"

"Say that again!" interrupted the dwarf.

"When I first visited my affianced husband, the Count of Felstein," repeated the nymph.

"Your betrothed husband the Count of Felstein!" cried Eck; "Ha! ha! go on."

"My appearance," she proceeded, "put all the people into a terrible fright. They fled from me, as from something dreadful."

"Dreadful! ho! ho!" again interrupted her small companion.

"This, I very soon guessed, was because my appearance was so different to theirs."

"Different! this is *too* much," shouted the man of the mine.

“And so, my good friend, I procured a peasant cap and jacket, and shoes too, as I found they called them, just like those worn by the girls of the village, and I keep them in the hollow of the elm tree we shall soon come to, and you would take me for one of that people in these attires.”

“I should?” laughed the dwarf.

“It is convenient to have them always ready for use,” said Mistel, complacently.

“Very,” said her companion. “*Very* good, my child. You are matchless, you——” his words were now choked by a fit of chuckling laughter, which not only convulsed his small person, but actually swayed the carriage about, in its unintermitting, though half-stifled indulgent, which might have continued one knows not how long, had not Mistel reminded him of the elm tree. In an instant, he gave the word of command, and the strangely-matched pair got out.

“You perceive,” said Mistel, “this jacket is padded, to make one more like that people.”

Very handily did the now good-humoured dwarf afford his assistance in its adjustment. But when the whole costume was arranged, the pale auburn tresses gathered up beneath the cap, and the tiny foot and green sandal overwhelmed in the ungainly shoes, the elf could no longer retain his mock gravity.

“ We must have my mother’s sparklers on,” said the nymph; “ and I think I shall then seem as much like this people as may be.”



“ Oh, this is good; this is beyond all, my child,” exclaimed he, now giving full sway to his bursting merriment, so that he fell right down upon the grass; where he writhed, and rolled, and wriggled, about and about, in great apparent enjoyment;

while the little man on the box, catching the contagion of the scene, indulged his mirth so unrestrainedly, that, after rocking himself to and fro in contortions that were actually fearful, he rolled quite off his seat, down upon his undulating brother, where they twirled, and tumbled, and twisted, in concert, till the discovery was made that the steeds had taken leave to be off, and had galloped far away. With one last summerset, high in air, the charioteer was after the runaways, making the forest re-echo to his whooping and hallooing, till he regained his teem, who might have learned the folly of trifling with a pigmy clan, whose impotence of look is equalled only by their skill to devise, their petulance to avenge, and their power to do. The ruffled garments of the boisterous pair re-arranged by their gentle charge, they were off again; when turning towards her, and composing his countenance to a venerable air, the sprite Eck told her that her last device had removed his single objection to the scheme, since it was against their creed, and beneath the dignity of any of the superhuman races of earth, to appear in any mortal assembly in their usual forms. "Indeed, thou would'st have had cause to rue it, but that was little to me. The case is changed now; since I know thee better command me, my child. In future my counsel shall be always thine."

Ineffable was the superior air of patronising wisdom with which this was uttered.

Brilliantly were the gardens of Felstein illuminated—their brightness, shade, and fragrance, enjoyed by courtly knights, stately dames, and lovely maidens. Mistel would fain have kept with the outmost crowd, as far as might be from the greater blaze. She could not but be struck by the discrepancy of the costume she had fancied so correct, with those of the gorgeous ladies glittering around. She mentioned her discovery to her chaperon, who gave no heed to the assertion, though all along he had foreseen the incongruous effect of their appearance, versed as he was in all things, mortal or otherwise. But when was dwarf known to resist any aggravation to a scheme of mischief? Perceiving her disquiet, he, in his holiday mood, took upon himself to re-assure her, by declaring it was all a mistake about her costume, for that she looked better, by a thousand times, than all the ladies whose sweeping vestments had so impressed her fancy.

Now, be it known, there was scarcely a maiden present, whose heart, or her friends' for her, did not turn in the same direction as Mistel's. Oh, lord of Felstein! guard thy heart from the united dazzlement of the ranks of bright eyes fired against it!

There was a burly Baron there, who marshalled a

regiment of twelve—eyes; for he had six daughters, so dauntless in the siege that they had actually drawn lots as to which should first scale the breach. The chance fell to the fairest of them, hight Valeria. True to their agreement, her they put forward in every way; her they set off with choicest apparel, and armed for conquest with the united blaze of their assembled gems. For her it was they had all squeezed together in the family coach, in order that the glistening folds of her robe might come forth in unrumpled lustre. Ah! who would not tremble for thee—lord of Felstein, beneath the double fire of sparkling eyes and refulgent gems?

Mistel wandered away from the crowd and the glare, to recover her self-possession. She was sad, she knew not why. Can it be believed that the superficial brightness of lights and jewels, silks and ermine, gilded saloons and gold brocade, overpowering her senses, seemed to her a hundred times more fair than her own fairyland; but it is ever thus with the novice in worldly splendours.

At length her companion, quite wearied out by this melancholy mooning, disgusted with his own inconspicuous part in affairs, and primed for sport of some kind or other, declared his decided objection to their owl-like avoidance of light and life; and Mistel suffered herself to be led into the great saloon,

amused, spite of herself, at the airs of her singular duenna. As the nymph passed along, you may imagine the sensation her appearance excited. All seemed to recognise her. "It was all true then— Yes, the Count's love of solitude was fully explained!" Some were especially indignant about the jewels; and "Look how daringly she displays his lavish gifts, fit dowry for a duchess or a princess," was buzzed about. Many blushed, others frowned, at the unblushing effrontery of the introduction. In a few cases of thoughtless young men, without marrying sisters, every feeling was swallowed up in admiration. All marvelled at the serene-seeming brow, the noble yet inquisitive glance, which she bent on all around her; and, above all, at the unchanging hue of the pale cheek of the village girl—if such she were. Sweet, yet cold, and even sad, was the smile of the abstracted one, as she moved amidst the fire of gleaming eyes, and heightened cheeks, that so contrasted with the ethereal composure of her lovely aspect. The dwarf meanwhile ambled consequentially by her side, briskly fanning himself, and ably imitating the withered graces of many he had seen present.

"Hearest thou," he said to Mistel, "what that swinish rabble murmur about?"

"No," she replied.

At that moment she did recognise the voice of her beloved; and a moonlight gleam in her eye, and a hue of pearly pink upon her cheek, fainter than the first blush of morning, made her so enchanting, that the audible murmur of applause she excited proved too much for the feelings of an outraged dowager, from the first the busiest of the nymph's maligners, and the mother of three portionless girls; and into the arms of the despairing trio the dowager accordingly fainted !

“ They shall all pay for this,” muttered Eck, between his teeth.

As Mistel approached the direction of her Count's voice, she perceived him standing beneath a canopy, upon a raised dais, at the upper end of the hall. By his side, in queenly guise, was the fair Valeria, glittering in beauty and triumph; her eyes were downcast, and her dark lashes rested on a cheek of unequalled brilliancy, set off by her golden hair. Her five tall sisters, like ladies in waiting, surrounded her, giving her the air of a superior being, and guarding the approach with the utmost vigilance. There was a witty, a learned, a sentimental, a laughing sister, and, best of all, a silent one. Each lent her aid to show off their beautiful sister; to give a general air to the discourse; while they allowed the Count every opportunity of saying and sighing.

Did a pause occur, the witty lady set every one flinching by uttering a sarcasm that included any or every body, except Valeria and the Count; or the learned damsel pronounced an apothegm that gave a decidedly lofty tone to the affair; or the sentimental maid murmured a touching sentiment; or the hoyden giggled up a hiatus; and even the silent sister showed remarkable skill in the management of her rare talent, illustrated by sighs and glances unutterable.

At that moment the Count perceived the nymph, and starting, made a hasty step forward, for he thought that his Mistel had come to claim his hand for the ensuing dance, and he forgot all beside. Mistel had seen his courteous observance to the lovely one by his side, and her heart never for an instant accused him for it; for she knew the Count's heart was her own, and never dreamed of discontinuance to aught that was or had been. Something that the lady had to observe to him for the moment checked the Count's purposed advance to greet his nymph; and just then Mistel found herself borne off by the seeming old duenna, and gently whirled along in the dance. She prayed him to give over; her mood was so ill attuned to the sprightly measure—a cloud had passed over her heart. Eck acceded to her request by letting go her hands. But once set going

himself, borne on by the music, a saraband he knew well, and by his long pent up resolve for sport; stimulated by the exercise, as well as by a cup of spiced wine, prepared specially for the stout Baron, to obtain which Mr. Eck had waylaid the Baron's page, he flung about with increased and still-increasing vigour, which soon cleared away the rest of the dancers far and near; and poor Mistel stood in the midst of the wide circle, collected to witness those wondrous gyrations, which circle was made wider and wider by the kicks and sudden springs with which the nearest gazers were assailed.

Mistel stood in the centre, as I said; and it was round her he capered, making her the mark for his antic obeisances, and whimsical "mops and mows." At first inclined to be rather amused, she suddenly perceived the angry looks that were mixed with the astonishment of the spectators; and, for the first time, became aware of the withering sneers that were cast upon herself. She gave an appealing look to the Count, and half-bent forward towards him. He was hurrying forward, when the lady Valeria again found something to observe to him, and the Count remained to hear it, standing half-approached towards his betrothed. A heavier sigh broke from the bosom of that gentle one, and a darker cloud was around her heart.

The sprite, meanwhile, mad with the impish impetuosity of his movement, the wine, the scene, and the music of his favourite saraband, next seized upon the outraged dowager before-mentioned, who in disgust with the want of sympathy manifested alike for her own state, and with the picturesque lamentations of her three girls, had recovered from her fainting fit. Her he whirled around and around, with a giddy swiftness unmerciful to behold. They yet continued to circle around Mistel, who thus was made to seem a party to the outrageously absurd scene. As the Count was seen advancing towards the forest nymph, whose hands were clasped to greet his approach, a murmur of disapprobation arose, but it was drowned in the singular din of the saraband, whose shrilly piping seemed to be piercing every one's ears. People began to feel alarmed and angry at the continuance of the unlooked-for performance. All thought it should be put a stop to ; but no one, neither lacqueys, or master of the ceremonies, guests, or groom of the chambers, would venture to approach the strange little teetotum old lady ; and, above all, no one could hear any one else's opinion as to what *ought* to be done, for the music, whose penetrating thrill circled around and about, to the deafening distraction of all present. To the universal surprise, this unusual clamour was at length perceived to be

the sole performance of a very little piper, dressed in the rich livery of a *coachman*, who, perched up in the orchestra, had put to flight the whole set of indignant musicians, whose every attempt to strike up had been repaid by a kick, or a buffet, or a blow from the fife, effectually silencing their efforts.

Well, while all this was going on, to the entertainment of some few, (the giddy and careless, of course,) the scandal of others, the pity of several, and the dark sneers of many—as regarded poor Mistel—who considered the Count the victim of a cunning conspiracy practised against his youth, unworldliness, and shyness of society—I say, during all the time it has taken to tell, you must not think the Count was hovering irresolute between the two fair ones. The Count moved on amidst the vast sea of thoughts that environed him. We know the beauteous Valeria had at his first step essayed something very soft into his ear, but a gracious bow was the sole response. Then did the learned sister step forth, uttering a Latin exorcism against witches and demons—the Count moved on. Next, the funny sister laughed, to be distinguished through the piping din of the music—but the Count paid no heed to that. Then, with simultaneous sisterly affection, did the silent and the sentimental ladies touch the arm of the Count, and thence point to the dark

frowns that sat upon the outraged brows of a group of angry fathers and brothers. But the Count, with a defiant glance at the frowners, moved on more quickly than before. Once more the fair Valeria approached, with a touching look and so deep a sigh, that for one second the Count stopped, whether to respond to the look and the sigh, I cannot say; but for the first time a pang of jealousy stung the heart of Mistel, and a darker cloud gathered round her heart; yet it passed away as the Count approached her. At that moment, and with the speed of lightning, the sarcastic sister, who had been preparing herself all this time, darted forward, and with a withering smile, directing his attention to the pitying scorn expressed by the sneering part of the company, whispered something in his ear.

Ye Heavens, or rather lowest depths of hell! how have ye barbed the biting power of ridicule! All else the Count had passed by unheeded; but now he stood as if he had been transfixed by an arrow. The same instant all the six sisters rushed passed the Count at the sight of their papa, the Baron, stout in the clutches of the wicked Dwarf. He had been compelled to abandon the outraged Dowager who, after being spun about like a dancing dervise, till all the breath was out of her body, he had left fainting in right earnest; and now by an unseen

power was the stout Baron compelled to follow in the series of vaultings, springs, and gambades, in which the marvellous old tiny lady next indulged. Eck's anger was against the Daughters, but his supreme passion for burlesque induced him to attack the Father: and droll enough was it to see the grand old gentleman copying with ludicrous unwillingness, yet anxious, awkward fidelity, every antic, turn, and tumble of the malicious elf.

Intrepidly the Count pressed forward through the clamourous group of ladies; for the music had suddenly ceased, and its din been supplied by the bewailment of the nine maidens, namely, the six daughters of the Baron Stout, and the outraged Dowager's three portionless girls, who all vented their anguished lamentations for the lost Count upon their respective parents, prostrate and scarcely breathing.

Sinking to the earth, midst sneers and now uttered vituperations, the Count saw his Mistel, whose outstretched arms were turned towards her lover. He was springing forward, when a palpable cloud, light and vapoury, rolled before his eyes, followed by two similar clouds, each transparent in itself; but as they descended one before the other, forming an impervious dark veil around him. In another moment, the clouds had rolled away; but

they had slurt the Count for ever from the light of his life, and darkened the splendours of his now worthless rank, for the lord of Felstein never more beheld his matchless Mistel!

The interesting tale-teller paused.

"Is that all?" I asked, with childish eagerness, drawing a deep breath, with the intenseness of my feelings, then a sigh at the picture of human irresolution that had been drawn. The next moment I continued jestingly, "Is it known what became of the Count? What the Dwarfs did next? and how the ball terminated?"

"The Dwarfs were seen by some one bearing Mistel away through the air," proceeded Wilhelm. "But the elves did not so easily let off those who had incurred their spite, (dwarfs never do,) nor permit a chance of their visit being too speedily forgotten. During the height of the consternation, the piping Dwarf had sprung from his orchestra, and in the brief space that had intervened thence to their departure, managed to make his rounds, and perpetrate some impish trick upon every obnoxious guest present. Some of the ladies' trains he had glued to the ground, the joints of the most malignant he had stiffened, or pinched them with divers cramps. But the most favourite trick was well worthy of elfish malevolence. It was that of fastening on

the anger-distorted face for ever, the expression and conformation of feature predominant at the moment. So that when these malignants, wearied with displaying such despite, would fain have smoothed their puckered brows, a painful stiffness of the muscles of the face warned them of the fruitlessness of the attempt. The frowners vainly strove to unbend their brows. The sneerers went sneering through life, with curved lips and noses that ever after snuffed the air. In like manner the sprite would have fixed the filial woe depicted in the looks of the nine disappointed maids; but that was found impossible, for it was more than half feigned, and, as people say, but skin-deep, so they soon got the better of it, for there were other counts in the world, and hope is eternal!

For the Count, he had rushed like a madman from the saloon, through grove and wood, into the far forest, which he made re-echo to the name of Mistel. There he was found the next morning, prostrate and senseless beneath an aged oak tree. He was at first thought to be dead; but life was restored, and he was conveyed back to the castle, where likewise was the unfortunate baron Stout, whom it had been found impossible to remove, and there were the baron's six daughters. It was these tender maidens who had sent out all the Count's

retainers in search of their lord. Their kindly anxiety about him had saved his life; and after restored him to life's consciousness.

For long and long might the castle be heard to resound both with the ravings of the poor Count and the groans of the stout Baron, who long felt the anguish of those enforced summersets, and never quite recovered standing upon his head. Anxious and unwearied was the attendance of those exemplary virgins. They procured an experienced nurse, to whose care filial duty impelled them to consign their dear papa; while themselves joined their united *inexperiences* together to nurse the youthful Count to health, as best they might. Of course, he married the blushing Valeria on his recovery; he could do no other for his tender nurses. They earnestly endeavoured to persuade him that all that had gone before was a dream, born of his fevered ravings. I know not whether they succeeded; at all events, he never mentioned his former love, nor was once heard to allude to the events of that fatal evening. He survived his marriage a few years. He rushed into battle, his powerful voice was heard in debate; but he was never again as other men. On the third anniversary of his former finding there, he was found dead beneath that aged oak of the forest, since called the Count's Oak. And it was

the first time—so closely had he been watched—that he had wandered there alone since that miserable night.

“It is otherwise said the Count died surrounded by his family, of which the five unwedded sisters of his wife, had constituted themselves a prominent part. Some declared he was killed with kindness, the attentive kindness of his extensive family. But a few glanced at the truth, in whispering that he died of—the sarcastic sister, whose sportful taunts one day brought back to his memory the similar jeers of another occasion, and drove him to seek out the scene of his former bliss, and the origin of all his woe, in the forest, where he sighed asunder the slight thread of his gentle life.

“The Count left one son, whom his mother and aunts never permitted to spend his time in solitary roving.

“The story is well known, and variously chronicled; and each succeeding lord of Felstein has respected the injunction so solemnly left by the unhappy Count to his heirs, in reference to the forest, every tree of which is held almost sacred. The peasants dare not pluck a twig, in apprehension of the haunting spirit of their long-dead lord, and the woodman restrains his axe within precincts of the castle, out of fear of the angry forest elves.”

“The Count,” remarked Juliet, seriously, “the poor Count was clearly the victim of the super-humanly contrived plot of Zara and the dwarfs. Such, I mean, is the inference of the *Tale*.”

“So he was,” I cried, gratified in a singular degree, to hear the luckless hero so exculpated; “and so was the nymph. Knowest thou what is said to have been her fate?”

“The story, which none deny to be founded in truth,” proceeded the narrator, turning to Juliet, “is by some turned something allegorically thus. The three clouds, which Mistel had felt long e’er she fainted, were the clouds of Wounded Love; and those three palpable vapours which the Count had seen and previously felt, were the clouds of Doubt, Coquetry, and Moral Cowardice. Over doubt, love was triumphant, as over flattered vanity. But the sensitive horror of the world’s sneer had for the moment overpowered every other feeling. ‘The Count,’ say they, ‘was a dreamer of dreams;’ and such are never happy in this life, never at home amidst their fellows, their souls are in a spirit-land, and ——”

“But the nymph, the heroine of the tale,” again I asked; “what is said to have become of Mistel?”

“Mistel, they say, was sent into a deep sleep by the united power of Eck and of her mother, from

which she awoke not till long after her mortal lover had slept with his fathers. Her childish glee, her simplicity, her innocent, infantine credulity, was gone for ever; she now sees and knows things as they are—is aware that they have two sides. Sorrow and love have taught her wisdom. She is still the unceasing care of Zara, the darling of the forest nymphs, and the especial protégée of the usually so fierce misanthropic dwarfs—of Eck in particular, who tames his vain, petulant nature in her favour, and unfolds for her and her alone the treasures of the mine, wrought for her delight into scenes more brilliant than any she remembers midst the haunts of men. All his control over nature's secrets he will exercise to beguile her melancholy. But still she roams about sad and alone, ever longing to break from company into silence and solitude, where she sighs over past remembrance, never ceasing to pine for a heart like that she once knew, whose every throb was in unison with her own. For such a heart, it is declared, she will be seeking till the crack of doom!"

CHAPTER IV.

"All deep things are song. It seems somehow the very central excuse of us. Song! as if all the rest were but wrappages and hulls!"

"THE Count, say they, was a dreamer of dreams; and such are never happy here. Happy!" I exclaimed, as I repeated the moral of Wilhelm's tale, which somehow rung singularly at my heart; "happy—who is so? But I—was not I some hours ago? Ah, many look back to the time they were, or now fancy they were. But the now, the present, is that ever a time of content? Aye, but there is hope—eternal hope!" And with springy health, with but twenty years, and no heart's remorse, who was ever long without it?

Odd as it may seem, I could not force my thoughts from Wilhelm's tale. Rejecting the episode of dwarfs, and the rest of the goblin machinery, the account of the fair Mistel was too closely in consonance with my old favourite waking dreams, too wondrously connected with a lovelier reality for me not to hug it to my heart, or

to hinder my brain from careering wildly where my fancy led. In my passage up the mount of knowledge, by the fair fertilizing streams bequeathed from the living fountains within the poet's breast; from the moment the light of the beautiful, from the unseen world, had beamed upon my soul, I had secretly cherished an idea, a hope, a belief in those pure spirits, who, apart from the earth and its destinies, have their being near and around the human theatre; whose office it is to guard, and cherish, and care for, whatever is loveliest and most allied to the finer mortal sympathies; to afford aid and countenance to those who aspire for the mysteries within their charge; to animate, and to encourage, perchance to— But I will not reveal the rest; for, as I said before, I would have you preserve a good opinion of me, as regards the soundness of my understanding, as well as in other respects.

The hurry of life, and its urgent realities had of late increasingly obtruded between me and my favourite dream-land; its dearest association had been superseded by a seemingly fairer reality, when, just on the eve of abandoning for ever those high dreams, I was effectually called back to my old faith again by the meeting in the forest. Thenceforth the world of human life, its circumstance and attractions, all that was becoming so dear to me,

paled to dimness before the view of my vision-land, that seemed to have been revealed to me. Since emerging from those more eloquent solitudes, the obtrusiveness of worldly ways and things had but distracted me; for the most part, a veil hung between me and the actual world. Then came the discordant voice of those social claims; I will not say, but for Juliet's letter, they might not have been unheeded. The kind voice of my old preceptor, his own and his daughter's friendship and cordiality, had won my gratitude, softened my exaltation; but I was still as one in a dream, till the discovery had forced itself upon me of Juliet's love. Now was I effectually awakened—recalled from my wavering purposes. A chain, not of flowers, but of steel-bright honour, was flung around me. I must be as other men—renounce my soul's phantasm, call back my errant senses from their world-wide wanderings. Yes, now that I had wherewith to grapple—to exercise over a strong will, the very struggle with my refractory fancy was a welcome circumstance, a thousand times better than the icy stagnation that had otherwise resulted from it all. Yet ever, ever between Juliet and myself had intervened those soul-penetrating eyes, whose circles—were they real, or unreal—embodied my whole life's poetry. As I lay looking into them through the

midnight darkness, soft religious music stole through the air, and seemed to express more vividly that which I untiringly gazed at. Music always drew me into my spirit-land; from this time it invariably conducted me to that particular nook of it in the forest, from whence henceforth all its bright rays converged. Soon was I lulled into that wondrous region, which now included alike waking visions and vision-like truths.

Early the next morning I wandered about the castle of my ancestors, till I came again to the picture gallery. I found the artist there. She wore her peasant's cap; but, as I caught the outline of her head against the light, it struck me that a muse's wreath had better become its statue-like proportions. She was standing opposite an easel, upon which rested a sketch she was beginning to colour. It represented a young girl sitting forlorn and desponding by a miserable hearth, her hair loose, her dress poor and uncared for. So young, and yet so sad—the expression was particularly touching. But above her head floated tiny sylphs and fairies, whose glad-inspiring looks were in singular though beautiful contrast with the mortal suffering they would solace or assuage. As I walked up the gallery the artist merely bowed slightly, without turning her head; and, quitting the

easel, took her seat opposite the portrait she had been copying the evening before, and began to work at the copy.

“What a charming sketch!” I remarked.

“It is a picture of life,” she replied carelessly, without discontinuing her work.

I thought I never heard a voice so sweet and melancholy.

“Why a picture of life?” I said. “But I fear I have disturbed you. Why, tell me, did you quit your delightful work—original, I suppose—at my approach?”

“Because I imagined you might begin criticizing and questioning, in which case I might very well get on with my copy, but not so with my own picture.”

After this odd announcement of the artist's pre-determination not to be so unworthily hindered from her work, there was a pause. I still gazed at her pretty sketch.

“And why do you call it a picture of life?” I presently asked.

“Because it depicts smiles and tears, which in life and the heart's history are ever thus nearly allied.”

“True, that in our brightest joys, sorrow proves too surely nearest at hand. But is there a dawn to the night of a heart's grief?”

“In youth, ever; in age, our best hope.”

Certainly a singularly sweet voice, I thought. “Can you not believe, that is, have you any sort of credence in those spiritual beings you can so exquisitely depict, or in any kind of ministering—?” I checked myself, surprised by my own question; for however one may cherish a dear, half-admitted hope, a flattering suspicion, it is another thing to put it into words; far more to give it utterance before another; and this was the first time I had found myself so betrayed.

The fair artist was silent. I thought she gave the slightest perceptible start. Was it in amaze at my absurdity, or sudden surprise? an involuntary response from a sympathetic chord in her own breast! Instinctively the sensitive mind is as reserved as the heart, and safe locks its dearest treasures, its fairest thoughts; from which the unheeding touch of the uncongenial; brushes the lovely bloom.

My hesitation had alone been suspicious, and I resumed, with perfect indifference, “It almost follows that poets or painters, when drinking in the beauties of nature—the appealing loveliness, the unspeakable effects of sky, and wood, and sea, and atmosphere—should have endued it all with sense and life. It being harder to imagine all but shows, and pleasing delusions, the accidental combination of material

atoms, than to animate the scene with naiad and nymph, the unseen guardians of such a universe of beauty!"

"Nor are the fair shows of nature delusions, otherwise than the divine ray of genius is a delusion; nor need there any world-spirits more palpable than they both are; their high origin speaking in their beneficent effects."

"But for ministering spirits, have we not high authority?" urged I.

"To beings so exalted you did not allude in confessing your Rosicrucian superstition."

"I have confessed to no superstition," I laughed. "Your genius might certainly impress one in the faith. But ah! one sees nothing like your little cheery spirits here." I paused—perhaps sighed; for at that moment I thought I had seen *one* that bore a singular resemblance to one of the angel heads.

"Painting, above all other arts," said the artist, "must avail itself of the aid of such metaphorical representations of that ideal which it must sensibly depict."

"Truly you have converted me," I gallantly replied. "Yes, art and genius are the real beautifiers of our dull earth—the true naiads and river gods whose fertilizing streams spread out to eternity."

"Nature, being the true Helicon," said she, "the

Divine reflected, in whose glassy depths (though all may conceive) the true poet alone reflects back again to the world: the electric affinity within his breast proclaims the loveliness there shown to be other than delusive, or merely superficial. Ah! more than fair seeming is the beauty spread over the world," continued the artist, thoughtfully; "more than external our fitness to inhale and enjoy this varied beauty;—the true wondrous sympathy is between the inner soul of it, and our own."

"You banish the fair denizens of air and wood, their fittest guardians. Banish them to pictures, and to verse!"

"Yes; for more ethereal is the fine spirit infused into, and emanating from ——."

"Having a lecture upon the Picturesque and the Poetic," said a laughing voice, which proceeded from Juliet, who now advanced in company with the youngster.

I was surprised to find their approach had been unheeded.

"All very right for an artist to rave about," proceeded my betrothed, "and proper, and consistent; but indeed thou and I, Karl, heed not much such brain-toys. Poetic conceits, and ideal schools of painting, have had their day during the long night of philosophic darkness. A fine day is a good

thing, whereon to explore the truths hid in the wondrous earth—a better thing than to be rhapsodizing about its mere superficial brightness!”

Further than ever from my heart did this speech seem to drive my affianced bride. The friendly raillery with which she included me in her own predilections did not soften me in the least; for her slighting allusions to the profession of the gifted peasant girl, when connected with her lowly origin, shocked me, while it made me look with added interest upon the object of her patronising contempt.

I was surprised to observe Juliet, the next instant, with her arm kindly resting on the artist's shoulder, as she commended her progress. I soon found that Juliet was kindness itself, but that she patronized every body. She next proceeded to inform me that we were on the eve of our departure for their old chateau; and that not this time might she have the honour of introducing me to the lady of Felstein.

“We shall bring you back very soon, and very often, Karl,” she went on; “for we must have many an exploring day together, and there is nothing like the Secondary range here. Besides that, I shall be peremptorily called back about the Great Fête; but then I long to show you my bones from the Oolite, and the Grauwacke impressions; but I intend to add to my treasures. Yes, we must return

here soon, that is, if you have got over your repugnance to the place."

"It is glorious. But if—" I know not where my thoughts wandered to.

"It is because thou wilt not acknowledge my title as mistress, thou refusest to consider thyself my guest here."

"And those delicious strains, enriching the midnight air, to lift one's dreams into heaven, were they suggested by the happy fancy of the good genius of the place?" asked I.

"By its good genius, certainly; not by her representative of the hour. No, thou must know that the lady of Felstein, with her recluse propensities, and rare predilections beyond the world of nature and of books, combines a peculiar enthusiasm for the fine arts. Hermia, her great protégée, represents her painting mania. She has also collected a choice band, which performs for an hour or two in the day, and at night, at all hours alternately; so that as the performers are not to be seen, and one is never exactly aware of the hours at which their strains are about to burst, or to steal upon the ear, the effect is consequently startling; at times speaking like the voice of conscience, or assimilating with one's thoughts in the oddest manner. Dost thou not find it so, Hermia?"

"Sometimes insinuating hope, or inspiring confidence," repeated the low clear voice of the artist.

"And a very useful thing too, and indeed an indispensable for a moping, dreamy career," rejoined Juliet. "But this same music, it must be added, is apt to distract one in the midst of nice calculations, though it may heighten the sleeping dreams and waking imaginings thou and Hermia have been speaking of. Well, I confess I like things put to a useful, that is a practical purpose; music is best when it keeps time to the waltz,"—and Juliet gave one or two illustrative circles,—“as one’s study is best illustrated by practical demonstration.” She continued, “Oh those dear gropings and pokings into that delicious chalk basin that we may enjoy together, Karl! I could journey all over the world for the sole purpose of arranging a geological stratified map of every country investigated by myself. That would be a glorious journey! My map of this family territory is almost complete, Karl; I shall require some of thy assistance though, before it is quite. I shall also call in thy aid to uphold me against Herr Henrich, who holds to the old theory of the Primary Rocks, not accepting the new term Hypogene, though it is so much more than clear that the chrystalines and traps are often more modern than the earlier organic strata.”

Much more remarked and questioned Juliet on her loved theme. To sit down contented with the grandeur and profoundness of a theory was not her method. She longed for progress and fresh discoveries, which in their contradictoriness to foregone conclusions, should revolutionize former beliefs. At our departure, Wilhelm demurely mentioned that he should like to assist upon the geological travels whenever they might commence.

As we journeyed along, and Herr Mineralisch remarked upon the remarkable growth of the trees in the forest we were skirting, Juliet said that the Countess's woods formed a branch of the great forest through which I must have passed on my way thither. Oh, if I had not passed through it!

Our eyes were fixed on the lessening turrets of Felstein, and the dark masses of wood, now too receding; and I involuntarily sighed as the distance widened between me and the forest shades, into whose charmed depths my heart soared away unrestrainedly. The last link communicating with my Mystery was now severed. Even around Felstein's castle was attached for me a singularly greater interest than about anything to which we were hastening. And that child of genius, Hermia, whose gentle thoughts were so much in harmony with my own, her I regretted that I might not see again. I

would fain have concluded our argument. And the strange boy, Wilhelm, since his interesting narration, had attracted me in an almost equal degree.

“Most extraordinary!” I murmured, half aloud.

“Who? what?” asked Juliet, with smiling eagerness.

“I was thinking of Wilhelm, I believe.”

“And of his tale, I ween,” concluded she.

“Well, I own he told it very cleverly, especially the hobgoblinish parts. But, Karl, thou art never!” —and Juliet concluded her address by a look meant to express what was unutterable.

Ah! few can picture the iron struggle with which I combated my abstraction, in order to return so much interest. And success rewarded my efforts. Was I not rejecting a true loving heart for a dream, which, in its wildest fulfilment, might mock but never satisfy the heart? So I argued, but in vain; and yet in outward seeming I succeeded.

CHAPTER V.

“ 'Tis not merely
The human beings' pride that people space
With life, and mystical predominance ;
Since, likewise for the stricken heart of love,
'This visible nature, and this common world,
Is all too narrow !”

JULIET's home seemed rather to depress her bright spirits. Truly, as she said, she was especially at home in her rule at the castle of Felstein. Her argumentative vein was surely exercised to the full by the constant battlings between herself and the Englishman, Henrich Brown, about the respective merits of their terms, “ Hypogene” and “ Primary,” to describe their adverse theories about “ Trap and Igneous,” “ stratified and unstratified Rocks,” and “ Basaltic Columns ;” which were being appealed to eternally ; though any one might see that, impetuous and persuasive as she was, had her adversary given in, the whole interest of the thing had been destroyed. As this debatable ground was disposed of,

their enthusiasms went uneventfully hand in hand throughout the range of every other progressive period.

In the neighbourhood resided a youth named Friederich, and his three sisters; and they were flourishing examples for the exercise of Juliet's patronising vein. Poor Friederich, his case was desperate with regard to the charming geologist, (charming to all except that one to whom she should have been irresistible!) The three good-humoured girls looked upon Juliet as a young Daniel, or a lady Cuvier; and being constantly at the Mineralisch's, looking and listening, they must have been wearied with upward gazing, and endeavouring to comprehend the, to them, incomprehensible!

One day I found Juliet and the Englishman in the midst of a discussion, that seemed to fill her with animation, though she was less voluble than usual. The three sisters sat by with open mouths, and eyes more than ordinarily distended, as Juliet herself was awed to wonder at the new theory being propounded to her by Herr Henrich. She seemed delighted at my coming, and bade me stay to be edified. I had caught the old terms, "fixed law and gradual progression;" and, indeed, heard little that was actually new, though the scheme of creation was compacted and complete. It was derived from

the gradually approaching resemblance to existing species of the extinct races of animals, throughout each successive geological era, ending in the human race; found to be the actual descendants of those prehuman creatures; when, after going through the whole organic series, Man at last walked erect from the woods, tail-less and talking.

“So you see,” said Juliet, half admiring, “we are directly descended from mushrooms and cabbages.”

This bold renovation of an old German theory, or rather the theory of a German, amused me, and I listened on.

What we call Life, the vital spark, was of course a chemical combination, the result of an unexpected meeting, one fine day, of some friendly atoms, under encouraging circumstances; which *monads* together became the “first organic being,” according to certain fixed laws of matter. Gradually and gradually this primitive vegetable substance ameliorated to the highest—ourselves the last link. Thus came round again the old story of fortuitous combination, etc. The ingenious chain of reasoning by which Juliet was being persuaded it was so much the better, was decidedly new, as was the circumstantial history of the continuous animal developments; but, best of all, the instances and illustrations by which it was sought

to show that every mental phenomenon, each eccentric soul's flight, was reducable to rule and calculation. At the time, I paid so little heed that I was less apt than I was after, to perceive the tendency of it all; and, I suppose, Juliet and her father were blinded by the glossing jargon of a First Cause. It was soon clear to me that Juliet, though unconvinced, was forced to uphold the wondrous discoveries in order to force me into a discussion. It needed not that to induce me to dissent from whatever Herr Henrich—so they termed him—might propose. Our long acquaintance and contemporaneousness in most things, instead of fast friends, had made us rivals, one of the two being sure to result. I must confess I admired and envied his cool assurance, and altogether felt a species of jealous distaste to him, as difficult to explain as impossible to justify.

“Ah, Karl,” said Juliet, in conclusion, “thou must naturally be shocked to find thy loved poets and mind philosophers all in the wrong; either reasoning or raving of utter fallacies—of Soul or Mind—and abstractions that are not.”

“Poets!” exclaimed the Englishman, with inexpressible compassion, “whose glory is in deceiving themselves and others!”

“And yet,” said I, in reply to Juliet, not deigning

to hear Herr Henrich's remark, "they to whom you allude, those philosophers, naturally dwelt upon what formed so sublime an echo within their own Souls."

I must here inform you that Juliet's three admirers, Linda, Anna, and Lesbia, who had been listening with such painful open-mouthed intentness, half charmed, half horrified, at having at length caught hold of a tangible piece of information between them, shortly after fell into a serious melancholy; their young gaieties and harmless occupations, embittered by the conviction that but a short time before they were no better than reptiles. In the end, Lesbia, the youngest, (who was indeed as old as Juliet,) being the strongest minded of the trio, persuaded Linda to take a greater view of things; and after a little while, with very small practice, they came forth a pair of ready-made natural Philosophers, dealing out second-hand their great discovery; and though they failed to enlighten their obtuse sister, Anna, or their sprightly brother, yet, with their half idea, and a good supply of doubts and scepticism to make up, they succeeded in dumbfounding a large circle of their acquaintances.

To return to Juliet, her discussions over, she would relapse into occasional abstraction, rivalling my own, a mood of which one could not have

imagined her capable at Felstein. Her father declared it was because she was so deeply in friendship, that, in the absence of the Countess, she was divided from the half of herself. For myself, I own another feeling suggested itself as the cause of her dejection; for must not that discerning spirit perceive the absence of mine? Juliet might also regret the other inmates of Felstein—the intelligent Hermia, and even Wilhelm; miss them, at least, for sake of patronizing or lecturing. At all events, her talk was ever of Felstein; and it was on the third morning of her absence, that, after an unusual silence, she began wondering and wondering how all things would get on there without her, when in the midst of her speculations the door was flung open, and young Wilhelm entered, flushed with his journey, and with the cold. From surprise or gratification, Juliet's cheeks reflected back the bright hue of his, as she took the note he brought.

“I have come commissioned to take you all back,” he said; “not one of us can bear your absence any longer. My Aunt is falling back into her former gloom. The workmen in the hall do nothing but bungle—put up, and pull down again, and puzzle with me our small matter of collective brains. Without doors, in the forest, things go no better; they have turned out a flourishing fragment of a fossil

shark, or saurian, no one knows which; indeed, it was thrown on one side, and would have been annihilated, had I not chanced to discover, and rescue the—the Treasure in time !”

Here an exclamation from all present relieved the late general state of apprehension for the fossil's fate.

“For you know, Mademoiselle Juliet, I cannot be in two places at the same time,” deprecated Wilhelm, in reply to Juliet's reproachful look; “and the roof of the grotto seemed the paramount claim at the moment.”

I shall not forget the sunny delight of Juliet's countenance. The momentary horror of Mineralisch and Herr Henrich at the near mischance to the valuable fragment, was succeeded on their part by curious inquiries respecting the discovery. But it was clear that Juliet thought only of the Countess; with the letter pressed to her heart, every look and question denoted that the interests of science were secondary to those of friendship. My heart warmed to her for it. Juliet would hear of no obstacle to the Countess's earnest demand. The whole party was to move. And that very evening, Wilhelm had the glory and honour of bearing us all back along with him to Felstein !

Juliet scarcely stayed to glance at the progress of her preparations in the great hall, which she swiftly tra-

versed, till she came to a door leading into a small adjoining study, where she sought her friend. But the Countess was not there, and away Juliet flew to find her.

Wilhelm must needs show us all this inviting retreat. It was rich in carved oak; and glowing with the pictured atmosphere of some exquisite landscapes of Italian scenery. A magnificent oriel window looked into the garden, bordered by the far forest, black and sombre against the sky. The hangings were of crimson velvet; and through some richly-stained glass, forming the higher panes of the window, the light came with a deliciously subdued religious effect. There was a carved oaken chair in the window, and before it a table and reading-desk, on which an open volume lay of noble type. It was one of the plays of the English Shakspeare—a species of literature this, I could not reconcile with the devotee Countess. The Englishman, espying a pair of spectacles that lay upon the open book, and taking them up, demanded to whom they belonged.

“To the Countess,” was Wilhelm’s laconic reply.

“That is too cruel!” cried Henrich. “I could not have imagined it of the charming Countess,” he sentimentally added.

“My Aunt, though clear, is near-sighted also, and so am I,” said the boy, quietly possessing him-

self of the said spectacles, adjusting them on himself, and looking through them at the Englishman with a peculiar scrutiny. I supposed he was indignant that Henrich should have touched them.

The next day at dinner, the Countess appearing, I underwent the honour of an introduction.

The lady of Felstein was slight and tall, and rather commanding looking. She was dressed wholly in black up to the throat, and her hair was totally concealed by a sort of Maria Stuart closely-fitting black cap. Her features were long and delicate; and her look especially grave, if not austere. I thought of her mother; and that luckless interview rushed to my mind, as I tried to recall that severe glance, to which I decided her daughter's bore a striking resemblance. Of this I might have better decided, had not the present Countess worn the identical spectacles Wilhelm had so unceremoniously rescued from Herr Henrich's sacrilegious touch. She bowed with a dignified courtesy to the Englishman and myself, and took her seat next to Mineralisch—Juliet and Wilhelm doing the honours.

It was impossible not to admire Juliet's grace and dignity; and her renewed sprightliness was beyond everything. The solemn lady of the castle was almost wholly silent, and would have been quite so, had she not been always addressed by the English-

man, and even appealed to by him. Her presence, which I must own had a particularly chilling effect on myself, imposed not the slightest awe or restraint upon the rest of the party, and four more eternal talkers than they all were I never chanced to hear. Plesiosaurus' bones, Christmas Fêtes, old Silurian strata, and ancient English customs, were all discussed. The Englishman was the hero of the hour, exclusively holding forth upon the last three topics; but, upon the conformation and minutest modes and habits of the prehuman reptile, whose fossil remnant had been just ungraved, the professor's daughter was singularly at home. To be sure, the professor himself never said a scientific word, simply because he knew *all* about it.

I felt a national disgust at the stranger's popularity; his marvellous assurance and flattered conceit; him whom at college I had looked down upon in such attainments. His comprehensive material theory of the universe, which Herr Mineralisch only smiled at, though I doubted that it might not in the end blind the shrewd sense of his daughter, assumed for its propounder a sweeping command of every branch of science, in its minutest and most general bearings; as each was touched upon in support of his dogmas and universal deductions.

Now, my wide practical experience, gathered in

those knapsack-carrying university investigations, told me that in one or two assertions he was as ingeniously wrong as he was boldly assured; thenceforth I exerted myself to the utmost to upset him and his theory, by clearly showing one unfounded inference from a misconceived fact. A lively debate ensued upon my statement. Juliet was charmed at the difference; but was evidently, with all her ingenuity, at a loss how she might retain us both as opponents. The Professor only nodded a quiet assent to my little overlooked important fact; and then went on being amused by Wilhelm's odd descriptions of his masquing costumes. An expedition that might serve to illustrate my position, to Juliet's excavation, was suggested for the morrow.

After the dinner the Countess retired, and honoured us no more by appearing. "The truth is," Juliet said, "the Countess is far too fond of solitude; and so unused is she to society that it distracts her, though it is for her good. And such an argu-fying as there has been to-day! But people must be for ever preaching and discussing!

"The Countess was," she must confess, "owing to the singular seclusion in which her life had been passed, perhaps too much given to abstract reflections, and lived in a strange dream-world of her own. Since their friendship, things were going

better with her, though she certainly was a child in much useful knowledge. But," she added presently, "that she was a dear romantic creature, and she loved her better than the whole world." A bright colour suffused Juliet's face at this avowal; doubtless she felt it was a random assertion.

At this moment, the liveliest and yet melting music came upon our ears. Juliet led us all whence it was wafted, to the great hall, that she might explain and advise about her Fête arrangements.

Within the hall we found most of the household and estate servants of the Countess assembled, and performing with disembarrassed ease, and measured pace, their favourite waltz. This being, Juliet informed us, the day of the week upon which she had arranged, with the Countess's sanction, to give them this diversion during the dead winter. "Shut out as they are from such amusements of a capital, it is really indispensable to them," said she; "for people without any mental resource, such entertainment must be doubly needed. With them it takes the place of imagination."

"I declare," said Henrich, "there is more grace in their measured propriety of movement than the waltz ever assumes with us. In our best circles your German dance becomes a whirling giddy affair."

As we advanced, the waltzers merely removed to the further end of the hall, or, to make way for us, withdrew through an open window on to the stone terrace, the evening being unusually mild. Ah! I well remember that evening. It seemed a sort of era—the first glimpse of repose in the crowded heart's history of the last few days. Every circumstance unconsciously noted at the time, enfixed itself on my memory with a tenacity and distinctness characterizing some few scenes and hours of our life, though one may have the calm recollection all unparticipated. I make no doubt you have several such unaccountable, ineffacable heart-pictures by you, and all to yourself.

There was the music going through Weber's charming "Aufordering," which was surely composed for the express sake of lending an ideality to the impetus of material excitement it immortally celebrates. Even Juliet's flowery festoons, their half finished forms and arrangements; a grotto she had had erected, and a bower adorned with exotics, and partly covered with evergreens, all are distinctly seen at this moment; and, above all, three stars piercing clear and cold through the air that came forth to greet the steadfast gaze through the open window.

"This grotto, with its icicles of glass and spar,"

said Juliet, who was to explain all her devices to us, "and I trust, Wilhelm, so heavy as it is, and so extensive as thou hast had it made, thou hast seen to its security; this grotto, which anon we shall cover with snow, is the abode of Winter—cold, drear, torpid Winter, whose hard hoar antiquity we represent by an old gentleman, appropriately tottering, trembling, and terrible. Opposite these is the evergreen bower of Green Holly.

"Juliet, the lady of the revels!" interposed Wilhelm.

"A sort of fanciful representation," continued she, "of the verdure and greenness Nature even now provides to cheer the desolation spread over her kingdom by the inexorable seer; provides in the outward world, as well as in the glow of kindly feelings of brotherhood and friendship, which our great approaching festival suggests and teaches, and the sad and sunless season makes especially dear and amiable to our within doors' world."

"Moral sunshine substituted for the actual rays," I said. Her eyes smilingly met mine; and, for the first time, *another* bright gaze interposed not between us.

"And how fitly represented!" exclaimed Henrich, bowing admiringly to Juliet, and choosing to apply personally her charming idea.

Indignant at his forwardness, moved at the evident enthrallment by the lively girl of all present, even of some of the old domestics, who gathered round to listen to the history of a fête in which they too would play their humble part, I seized and with some enthusiasm pressed Juliet's hand; for universal admiration is a powerful impetus to one's own; and I was really touched as much by this unexpected play of fancy, and kind thoughts, as by her beauty and brilliancy. The ice-cord seemed loosening from my heart. Juliet's further description of the coming festival opened a little world of imagination.

"It is a romance," I said; "and the meaning, how beautiful!"

"Do not commend me, Karl, for it," said she; "I must disclaim the honour. The old English masque much attracted me at first. But a more fanciful brain devised this prologue to our revels, which I fancy will more surprise thee in the realization."

After Juliet had explained her plans, and the parts we should all have to play in illustration of them, we moved off, to give full place for the waltzing, which was resumed with renewed vigour, as we stood near the doorway to observe the joyous scene.

"Nothing like this in formal England," remarked

Henrich; "no dancing and fête-ing after this genuine fashion, and amongst the most genuine class."

"Do you not permit it for your people; and have you no balls as we have, in your great towns, for different trades and callings?"

"Even down to the *Blanchisseuse's* ball!" laughed the Englishman. "No; such custom holds not with us. It is unaccordant with the genius of the people; consequently should ever such assemblies occur, on a scale resembling those you have alluded to, it is probably from their infrequency, but they have a very different character to those of your happy father-land."

"That is not good," said Juliet. "It is a wrong system of benevolence that is considerate for the people's physical wants only; and it is a natural consequence of being shut out from amusement of any kind, that they should abuse whenever they may chance to attain the forbidden delight."

"O wise young judge, how much more older art thou than thy looks!" quoted Henrich, in English.

"Ah! to live in the world, and realise such kind thoughts for those that most demand our sympathy, would counterbalance even one's fairest ideas of world seclusion," I half whispered to Juliet, with much enthusiasm.

"World seclusion, Karl? Yet a dreamer of

dreams?" replied Juliet, with a peculiar smile upon her rosy lip.

"Thou sayest right, my child," remarked Herr Mineralisch, "about the absolute claims upon us of the children of toil. It is they whose manual dexterity or power brings all our suggestions and shadowed-out thoughts to bear; and the good of well-organized recreations for them is not a superficial one, it lies at the root of things."

"Both classes reap the benefit equally," put in Henrich. "It is one of the theories of the party to which I have the honour to belong, and which has acquired the *soubriquet* of 'Young England,' whose pride and honour is in the opprobrium and jeers of the unchivalric many."

To talk of this party, Herr Henrich knew was always the way to excite Juliet's interest.

"Truly," she said, "excluded as are your peasantry, your multitude, from our bright world of investigation, should you not countenance and sympathise with the sole delights they can enjoy, in exchange for those of which they are deprived for our good. It is poetical justice—eh, Karl? as well as peremptory duty, as *direct* as any other."

Though Juliet's manner of turning to me at the accusing word "poetical" was decidedly wicked, it did not hinder me from raising her hand to my lips,

overcome by the attractive sweetness of her manner and intents. "Ah!" I cried, "there needed not so much eloquence to impress one with thy comprehensive philosophy, thy inclusive benevolence, so ——"

I broke off in my address to Juliet, suddenly, with a half-stifled exclamation, a convulsive start, in the midst of my hand-grasp. Ah! what had I seen! piercing brighter than the stars through the open window. Yes, again had beamed upon me those deep penetrating Eyes, that for the second time met mine; for the second time, though ever since the first, they had been continually looking into my heart—ever since, except within the last hour; and now they shone upon me, to reclaim my failing allegiance, just as —— Heaven! it was, it could be no phantasy! There, above the heads of the whirling, moving, unmeaning mass, undulating like a wave between me and them, glowed, like music, and as in concert with it, those very orbs—how intently! My grasp of Juliet's hand relaxed, and mine was raised to my eyes. Several spoke to me, though I distinguished nothing; nothing but one object. Yet was there an instinctive feeling, a recollection of the frequent sarcasms and undeviating impression of my vividness of fancy, ever present with the Mineralischs, moving me to stammer something about a sudden giddiness, e'er I rushed forward

in much shorter time than it has taken to tell. But, after I had passed my hand across my eyes, the apparition was gone; and from the terrace I looked only upon the dim cold air, enlightened but by the pale stars. "But it was no vision," I repeated, as I bounded from the steps, and along the walks, with mad impetuosity. "No, Mortal or Fairy, this time thou dost not escape me!"

I had but just got accustomed to the darkness, when I distinguished something moving along with a swiftness rivalling my own; ah, in truth no vain phantom! Excited by frantic hope, the contest was unequal; already the distance between us was more than half lessened. Oh! I perceived that it was a female form. And now it slackened its former pace to a measured dignity. Would its narrow bounds yet contain my beating heart?—"No, this time, glorious nymph, thou mayest not elude me silent and unreplying," I cried, about to spring forward. But, mortal or sprite, instead of endeavouring to escape, she turned and advanced towards me. I was spell-bound!

"Herr Karl," said a soft voice, "is it you? What or whom seek you?"

It was the voice of Hermia, the young artist! Mechanically I released her—"I, I thought—Have you seen naught? no one pass? Oh," I broke

forth in an agony of despair, "I have taken the wrong way; am again mocked, deluded, through my own irresolution, and she is lost to me for ever!"

"Stay, Herr Karl," said Hermia, as I was rushing past her; "stay, I—I beseech you." She went on falteringly, "Tell me, whom you look for? what it is?" she gently asked.

Her voice, sounding of soothing and sympathy, affected me; and, before breaking away, I hurriedly and in part endeavoured to explain my wild words, and reassure her apprehension; again demanding of her whether she had seen no one pass along the terrace a few minutes since.



I was about to dart away again without further parley. "Herr Karl," she said, advancing as though she would stay my departure, "listen. I—I myself was on the terrace at the time you mention, taking advantage of the open window to look in upon the dancers. There

was no one beside!"

“Great heaven! can I thus have deceived, deluded myself!”

“Certainly it is some delusion, Herr Karl. Endeavour to calm yourself; nor longer incur the night air, for your fancy is fevered, and the air is chill; and you have excited yourself to picture——”

At this moment there was a rustling noise at the angle of the path, at which we had arrived. “Ho! who goes there?” I exclaimed.

“It is I,” replied a familiar shrill voice, which I did not at first identify.

“I, Wilhelm, who have sought you for your good, conceiving that, from your mad rush from our society, you were about to shoot yourself or somebody else. But ah, who is here? A tête-à-tête—another sort of affair altogether; a circumstance under which one knows not whether one is welcome or *détrop*.

“Most certainly welcome, good Wilhelm,” said Hermia; woman always speaks first on such occasions.

“I had come out, after a long day’s work, to enjoy the air and to look at the stars, when passing along the terrace, Herr Karl saw, in the surprise or excitement of the moment, the heroine of a heart’s dream in poor Hermia. The hallucination is past; I deeply regret having been the cause of it. But

stay, Wilhelm; endeavour to calm your friend's mind, and remember the chill air is best avoided after such excitements. Good night, Wilhelm; think of my caution!"

With an impressive emphasis on her last words, which convinced me she took me for nothing less than a madman, a belief I was beginning to share, and a gracefully waved adieu, the young artist glided away down another path; and in her young dignity, which, when considered in reference with her high endowments, so well became her low estate, was gone! I indeed began to mistrust myself, my impressions, and most things else!

CHAPTER VI.

“Heroes have gone out—Quacks have come in. . . .
Consider them with their tumid, sentimental, vapouring about
virtue, benevolence—the wretched Quack squadron!”—*Carlyle*.

“AH! it is good to be alone—alone with nature,
and her sublime secrets, by the mountain side; or
in the forest, best of all.”

Such was my exclamation, as I gained those
forest solitudes at the morrow’s earliest dawn. After
the torture I had undergone in the superficial sym-
pathy of the castle, the light-sounding, deep-mean-
ing queries and questionings of the imp Wilhelm;
the tormenting allusions of Juliet; the sarcastic
smile of the professor; and, worst of all, the scarcely
tangible satire of Juliet’s English admirer, how did
I pant to be far away from the clamour and the
sting of a human tongue! Deeper and deeper I
penetrated the sombre wood. Yet it was not con-
templation I wanted; no, I had learnt to distrust
my own thoughts within the world of my feelings
and my fancy.

Juliet's half playful, half bitter system of raillery had first surprised, then alternately wounded and won me to conviction or admiration. All the last feeling was now merged in indignation against her, her impish little Familiar, and her scientific ally. The empire over me she was regaining, was lost for aye. It was she who, either through pique at my sudden defection, or from curiosity or love of mischief, had dispatched Wilhelm after me, with solicitous kindness and seeming friendly inquiries; but her own proffered sympathy was pointed with the most determined malice. Wilhelm had, without doubt, enlightened his revered preceptress upon the garden scene, in which entertaining story the rest had probably participated. The thought was distracting—far too annoying; but in my frame of mind, of previous exaltation followed by so dire a downfall, to be met at every turn by open-eyed wonderments, and covert impertinence, was beyond ordinary endurance. Before quitting the castle, in passing through the picture gallery, I had seen the artist Hermia engaged there; and, after all that had occurred, I could not pass without accosting her. In the brief interview that had ensued, she had made no allusion to the event of last evening, studiously avoiding aught that might lead to it. This, with her sweet voice, and the calm enthusiasm and

general import of her words, was singularly grateful and appreciable, and contrasted pleasingly with the persecuting personalities of Juliet and her myrmidons.

Away from it all, I became calm and philosophical. "Ah!" I exclaimed, "in this eloquent solitude, "how contemptibly lessens every social ill! In the universal significance of Nature's marvels, how infinitely beneath one's scorn is the remembrance of the injuriousness of the wise in his own conceit—sceptic—one's fellow-man!"

Notwithstanding my magnanimous generalizations, I found my Social Ills would resolve themselves into the thought of the mocking trio at the castle! that the prominent illustration of my "fellow-man" was that, by far most obnoxious of his species, Herr Henrich. "Yes," I continued in reverie, "Hermia is right; nature and solitude are the nurses of the loftiest flights, the deepest investigations of the soul. The prophets of old thundered thence their inspired warnings to a world lethargic in the midst of its aimless activity; and the divinely gifted, guided by the light of their genius into future ages, breathed forth or shaped out their inspirations beneath your serene teachings. Untiring application—another attribute of genius that would be great—how truly is it the great refuge in all worldly despites, and also from ourselves.

Ourselves ! how forcibly did I feel this, whose unrestrained fancy had of late been permitted its way, to the oblivion of all else, till, real or unreal, its constant image cheating my senses, had beguiled them into the most extravagant illusion.

I must quit Felstein ; it had grown unbearable to me, and so had all connected with it ! I waited but for a private interview with my old preceptor—that was due to him. For my future, you will think it strange, and me most weak—but, then, these are true confessions, and necessarily lack the consistent, smooth flow of other narratives—I hovered between the two opposite courses. The first was to seek through the world my Phantom beauty, despite every obstacle of each sphere, known or unknown ; the other was in pursuance of Hermia's animating idea of the peremptory call upon genius or cultivation, to return home and bury myself in solitude and study, with the purpose of compiling a theory of creation, in contradiction to Henrich's renovated system of chance-directed atoms, distractedly working their dull onward course in a soulless, godless, dun, leaden machine of a universe. Thus I might forget the mocking apparition, which, mortal or beyond mortality, as I had in my wildest thoughts pictured, was converting my existence into that of an expectant visionary.

“Action! work! that it is which contributes, is indispensable, to a healthy tone of mind.” So Juliet and they all said, or significantly insinuated, in reference to the reverse frame of mind they could perceive in me—I would prove to them I was no dreamer. Wrestling against my bewildering thoughts and reminiscences, in the very scene most calculated to renew the image therewith associated, I not only filled my tin case with curious specimens of elementary plants, but framed a concise, pungent response to some important positions in the Englishman’s pedigree of organic life, by demolishing a necessary connecting link or two of the goodly chain; and in a letter, I would spend the night in transcribing, meant to bequeath it to the company of Geologists in general, and to Herr Henrich in particular. It was singular enough, that I had just received the work from which the theory was derived, with a wondering admiring commentary from my father. Thinking of this, I came upon what were doubtless Juliet’s excavations. They deserved the character she had given of them, and I was soon lost in the investigation of those long-treasured marvels of nature’s transformations. Thus absorbed, I was startled by a chorus of voices uttering interjections; and there came upon me the professor and his daughter, Herr Henrich and Wilhelm.

“ We thought we had lost you !” said one.

“ Or that a spirit-sphere had received you !” cried another.

“ Here he is, true and loyal to our appointment,” said Juliet, (in verity, I had forgotten all about it ;) “ though in truth, Karl, thou knowest not how we have been speculating about thee. We really could not imagine where thou hadst got to *this time*.”

“ Your concern,” I gravely replied, “ for my whereabouts, is an honour ill bestowed on so erratic ——”

“ Oh look !” cried Juliet, seizing my tin case, and peering in at the treasure ; “ what an exemplary proof of industry—admirable ! And, Karl, call up all thy experience—such wonderful proofs as we have adduced on the side of Fixed Law, one could not have expected it !”

“ You allude to the Noah’s ark system, put forth in a lately published English book, and introduced to your notice by Herr Henrich.”

“ Introduced !” cried Juliet. “ I declare, Herr Henrich, I thought you had principally found it all out yourself.”

“ I have not that honour,” said he ; “ though I am happy in being able to claim it for a countryman.”

“ And yet,” remarked Wilhelm, “ one finds it

somewhat hard properly to impress one's self with the honour of being descended from a tadpole!"

"Hush, Wilhelm, the thing is too marvellously borne out to be turned aside by thy light jesting," said Juliet. "But, Karl, why dost thou call it the Noah's ark theory?"

"Because in that equally entertaining toy-specimen of ingenuity, one finds a like unheedfulness of such minor things as proportion and propriety, and also of probability—a remoulding of nature upon a principal of fairness and of fitness for available resources: thus, from the butterfly to the elephant the disproportion no longer startles; and thence, again, from monkeys to men is also a small matter."

"My father," remarked Juliet, "advanced just now, the undue depression of the intellects of some races of animals, and the elevation of others, in order to fit in with the arrangements; though the gradual amelioration of external structure is better made out."

"That," said Wilhelm, "is not the fault of the system, which is clearly an excellent system, but of the brutes themselves. If, in opposition to his facial angle and cerebrum, some obstinate carnivora or digitalus chose to cultivate his mental or moral instincts, is that ——"

"Now, Wilhelm," put in his preceptress, "until

thou art a more perfect master of the sciences involved in this masterly theory, thou wouldst do better to withhold thy impertinence."

"I am but seeking information, gracious mistress," deprecated Wilhelm. "I can comprehend with some distinctness how that Salmon and Sharks, and other finny creatures, ambitioning the shores, and scorning the waters, accordingly developed wings or webbed claws—suited to the emergency—and stepped forth lizards and penguins; but I would fain have a less confused explication of the future genealogies of those different families."

"Such lesser details, though illustrated by modern parallels, and upheld by each advance in science, are not minutely carried out; being of small consequence to the grand general Idea characterizing our theory of Universal Law and ever-continuing Progression," said Henrich.

"And yet I find in the programme of the organic habitants of the globe, of each distinct prehuman era, drawn up for me by Mademoiselle Juliet," said Wilhelm, "that the same simple creatures, from Crinoid to Crustacean, have been ever numerously overspreading the earth, without being ameliorated or improved. A remarkably hard case, poor things!"

"Your countryman's conviction of his singular

descent, and the discovery within the concave of his brain of his lack of soul, is so far well; but that many others should be found sufficiently philosophical to receive complacently the dogma of the non-existence of the impalpable heavenly essence is not to be expected," I remarked to Henrich.

"Poets, for instance?" queried he.

"Certainly," said Juliet; "in their erratic dispositions there seems as little of fixed law as may be."

"As little of fixedness as Individuals," he rejoined; "though as a Race they will be found to bear out the exact proportion which is the undeviating law of nature."

"Thus, then, are we the poor slaves and lumpish machines of an accidental organization, to believe nothing but what we may grasp with tooth or nail?" I exclaimed, unable to retain my disgust. "Lower than this things cannot come, which is one comfort. Further we are mocked by the ingenious term, Nature; poor misused, once heavenly Nature! thy numerous worshippers of old, and glorious troop of successive adorers, bowed to an empty shadow; and thy real votaries are now decided to be Gall, and Spurzheim, and Larmark, whose materialist disciples have erected an hierarchy of atoms, *the arch-priest of it*—gradual progression!"

"But is it really thus, Karl?" asked Juliet, a little moved.

"You may see the work, and my father's commentary. With *his* boundless conception of the resources of science, he is staggered by the dauntless determination of the author to account, after his peculiar fashion, for every single phenomenon of nature. Not to explain the inexplicable would be too derogatory."

"Your theory of the sublime, being of course the incomprehensible," smiled in superiority Herr Henrich.

"Once I thought I comprehended a manifest distinction between opposite modes of human action," I calmly replied; "but I find we should never be so wanting in benevolence as to talk of a 'wicked man;' such an one being only 'unfortunate' in the criminal formation of his cerebrum!"

The uncongenial season hurried the party away, without prosecuting any extensive investigations, the time having been wholly taken up by the vehement, though only half discussion of what Wilhelm called the "Tadpole History," because therein man is compared to the ephemeron of an hour, who, contemplating the gambols of a tadpole family in the pool beneath him, unchanged and unchanging

during his little life, could never be brought to believe that in future hours—ages to him—the said tadpoles would develop claws, and be fitted to creep on earth, and croak their amphibious triumph thereat.

CHAPTER VII.

"It makes a dream of my reality:
Upon some island of the ethereal heights
I've lived for these last days!"

IMMEDIATELY upon getting to Felstein took place my interview with Herr Mineralisch. I told him my determination to leave the next morning; explaining, as well as I might, my feelings with regard to his daughter, our utter dissimilarity in all things, which, considering the circumstances in which we were placed, rendered my longer stay nothing less than the most embarrassing thing in the world. Surprised and half amused, the professor listened. He could not conceive any such necessity for my tearing myself away—it was a thing not to be listened to. I had misconceived the whole affair; besides we knew not half enough of each other. And for Juliet, if consideration for her was in my thoughts, I was to rest perfectly at ease; she was too universally absorbed in other matters to be in a hurry to fall in love. Again the professor smiled, and I was dumb on the last subject, as I could not declare that I did

not agree with him. It was impossible to speak of my own pre-occupation, so I only repeated that I must positively quit Felstein. Mineralisch exacted that we should conclude our explanation in the evening. As for my going, there was no settling such a story as that in a hurry; but, in the mean time, he must see my father's letters—and at the end of the evening we could resume deliberation. To this I agreed.

“Further consideration may change thy intent, Karl, my boy,” he concluded.

He was a true prophet!

It occurred to me that it was due from me to take my leave of Hermia; and, as it was getting dusk, I hurried along the corridor to the picture gallery, to seek her; but she was not there. I regretted it, as I should quit Felstein, probably for ever, before the dawn of the following morning.

Seated at dinner (which was not, at the castle, the usual mid-day meal) next to Juliet, I mentioned my having but just now sought Hermia and the Cenerentola in vain.

“Thou sawest her this morning?” quickly put in Juliet.

“But not the Cenerentola, which you told me was finished; and, as you said awhile since, that

Hermia was not interrupted by, but rather liked the observations and hints of amateurs, I took advantage of the hint. But I have not seen the picture; and this evening I particularly wished to see the artist and it; and—But wherefore is it that we have not the honour of seeing the Countess to-day?"

"Probably because the unceasing disputations of yesterday distracted her. She is not accustomed to it. And dost thou know, that, though an unscientific person herself, her clear sense at once perceived the uprooting tendency of Herr Henrich's Universe Theory, which captivated and confused our ever busy, worldly, workingday brains; and unused as she is to the immitigable newfangledness of contradictory systems, without bound or limit to their wild prankings, ever battling with each other, she is offended at the boldly insinuated, though unproclaimed intent of this history and pedigree of self-governing atoms; though Herr Henrich, for her edification, certainly showed it on its best side. But how charmed thou lookest, Karl! ah, because of poor Herr Henrich's vain endeavours. Well, to keep thee in good humour, thou shalt see the pictures; Cinderella is at present in the Countess's study, but both are completed. And thy beautiful costume, that likewise is perfect. We must see thee in it, Karl; it will be captivating!"

Juliet was so friendly and obliging, that, though I had hitherto wanted courage to name my speedy departure, the thing was still more difficult now; while the unjustifiableness of not undeceiving her was aggravated; so, with a sudden effort, I informed her how that untoward circumstances must force me immediately from their circle, and from their coming revels.

I know not what Juliet's countenance expressed; for, receiving my announcement with a slight start, she turned her head away; and after murmuring a few words of incredulity and opposition to my determination, relapsed into silence. They were painful moments for me. Soon after she quitted the room.

Vainly the professor desired to draw me into a discussion of the details in my father's letter; my state of mind admitted of no such diversion of its attention, and was such as I hope you may never suffer. A chaos of adverse sentiments turmoiled therein. At first, after my interview with Herr Mineralisch, a heavy load seemed lifted from my soul; now came remorse, misgiving, and that inevitable enhancement of the value of any object, which is sure to follow the thought that one has cast it away for ever!

I was miserable, full of foreboding, and reproached by conscience. Had it not been for Juliet's odd

allusion to Henrich, I should have been comforted by an idea that had lately occurred to me regarding them both. The hero was now supplying my place with the professor; at least, the professor was listening to him, whose oft-recurring terms of science reached my ears, and unmeaningly buzzed through my pre-occupied brain. Wilhelm was now busy with his geological books; but I fancied his eyes rested ever and anon upon me with an inquisitive expression. He, of all the rest, might nearest divine my secret.

At length Juliet entered. I started as a culprit.

"You would like to see the pictures," she said in a low voice to me.

Wilhelm got up, and alacritously advanced.

"The poor dress that has been so charmingly modelled from one of them also awaits; and though its claims are to be cavalierly disregarded," she continued, "yet thou wilt not refuse to let me see thee wear it, Karl; I must do so. Thou wilt not deny me this?"

She was so earnest about it that I could not refuse this, probably her last request.

They were to await me in the corridor. When I returned, equipped as Count Sigismond, Juliet commended the appearance, and Wilhelm scampered round and round me, admiring the texture of the

stuffs, and touching the velvet with monkey-like approval. Mechanically, I moved along with them to the gallery, but was again distracted to observe Juliet's voice and her hand tremble.

The gallery was lighted at the upper end only. But even now I must pause to collect myself, and still my reminiscent excitement, before I tell you what I now beheld. Should I again mistrust my senses?—was I living in a dream? Beneath the lamp stood Hermia in her painting blouse, the beautiful head unclipsed by the peasant cap. Hermia, as I thought; but as I advanced to address her, she raised her eyes—and they, they were the eyes, the matchless eyes, that had looked upon me in the gloom of the dreary forest, and through the open window in the dim evening. Was the mystery solved? Oh, dull, most dull, that I had been not to have so interpreted the wonderful sympathy that drew me to Hermia, the adventure of the preceding evening. And I was hasting to quit Felstein; while it was Felstein that contained the Jewel for which I was to ransack earth and air! I could have thrown myself at her feet; but ah! I, who till lately knew it not, had learned wariness; and there was the embarrassing presence of others. A thousand lightning thoughts passed through my brain, yet my heart retained but one. Yes, artist or empress, masquerading

peasant maid, or disguised nymph, I was here for ever! But I would not again be the sport of the frolic household, especially now, and I felt the necessity of concealing my transport. But before all other thoughts was the fear of losing her—of seeing her again vanish before my eyes—and springing to her side—

“We have met before,” I uttered in a suppressed whisper, “before we met here! I have thy gift yet. Oh, leave me not again to darkness and despair!”

She turned away from my ardent gaze; but made no denial to my assertion. In her downcast look, and averted face, I again beheld the artist Hermia, whom I was about totally forgetting in my forest Vision. Even yet I gazed in trembling apprehension that all should prove illusive; that she would disappear, or change, or resolve into the Hermia she had been to me but that morning. But, then, the eyes reassured me, as they once more met mine. My present bliss was ecstasy, for it surpassed my former distractions, which were all cast into oblivion.

She now endeavoured to release her hand from my glad grasp, turning her sweet looks from me to Juliet and Wilhelm, who, at a little distance, had fallen into a disputatious dialogue. But though I

comprehended her, I made no motion to quit that dear long-sighed-for possession which I but held in fonder pressure.

“No, tear not away from me this blissful certainty, without leaving hope to take its place in my heart; say but that we may meet again, and again! that I shall not be again beguiled, deluded!——”

“Herr Karl, of what do you accuse me?”

“Of having been so determinedly engrossed over thy pictures, as to have remorselessly; systematically, cruelly veiled from me the light of thine eyes; and now, of not calling me ‘Thee,’ and of not recognising me before. But oh, promise me I shall again behold thee, promise but this!”

“It was Herr Karl that failed to recognise Hermia.”

The pair were approaching, and I looked beseechingly at her. “Truly I am here from morn to mid-day,” she said, hurriedly, (and indeed all had passed rapidly as thought;) a smile sweeter than her words filled up the sentence.

I turned to conceal my emotion over the picture. A hand rested on my arm—it was Juliet’s—and seemed to communicate an icy chill through my veins. Effectually it restored me to the common world, and to all my old doubts respecting her.

“There is truly a pretty sentiment in this forlorn

Cenerentola, as there is in all Hermia's paintings," she remarked. "How fondly and caressingly those dear little spirits encircle her sorrowing form! From their looks of good omen thou sayst, Hermia, is to be drawn the cheering moral, that the dawn is oft nearest when the darkness seems deepest."

"But Hermia says, too," put in Wilhelm, "that there is a great fault in the moral of that Cinderella story, though it may have more reality on that very account. It is, that the prince did not seek and sue the heroine in the midst of her patience and her cinders!"

"Which he would have probably passed by," laughed Juliet.

"His discernment is never tried."

"Would it have stood the proof?" said Hermia.

"How serious!" exclaimed Juliet; "certainly the blaze of the lady's finery, and the prestige of a seeming brilliant position were her own rivals. But probably she never speculated upon their comparative potentiality with her princely lover, for we know she lived happy all the days of her future life—a just inference; for people that split straws and torture themselves about hairs'-breadths are not so. She was wise," concluded Juliet, more gravely; "wiser than thou with thy nice distinctions, Hermia."

"I do not remember having made the remark Wilhelm ascribes to me," said Hermia, and she blushed, perhaps at thought of the singular significance of its allusion. Amidst the ideal atmosphere that surrounded this child of genius, this was the most mortal demonstration I had detected. I did not think her less lovely for it, though the story of Mistel's never blushing rushed to my mind.

"And how brilliant thou hast made our melancholy knight look, Hermia," pursued Juliet; "but that beautiful dress, whose form and hues thou hast so effectually developed in thy copy, and in which Karl looks so very glorious, will not, I fear, grace our fête."

"Ha!" cried Wilhelm. "Poor Sigismondo, an ill fate seems still to pursue whatever relates to thee! Yet he is truly the popular man here."

"Do not thou pity him so, Wilhelm; his life though one of misfortune to himself, may not have been so to others. There must have been, I am certain, some noble deed, some mitigation of harsh villainage, some sacrifice for the general good, so to have endeared him to the people about—him alone of all former and after Counts. And that he still lives in their memory, the hero of their historic lore, my personal experience makes me perfectly aware."

As Hermia said this, she directed the slightest

glance towards myself. This was not the first time she had seemed nobly bent on reminding me of her peasant origin.

“In that case my good aunt will be the divinity of future ages,” said Wilhelm; “for she does not stop at opening her hand—as one chucks handsfull of barley to hungry cacklers—to her neighbours’ actual necessities; but, though she spurns at diversion herself, kindly, nobly identifies herself with *their* recreations and amusements, good soul!”

“The Countess has not, and probably has not the power to perform any signal act of greatness,” said Hermia. “There are fewer grievances to be redressed. And besides, the power of the lords of Felstein has long ceased to be!”

“Ah, but if Felstein had a lord,” cried Juliet; “and some people had their own,” and she looked at me.

“Hold! treason!” exclaimed Wilhelm; “I really cannot— Ah,” continued he presently, “the Countess, too, holds forth about the odour of great deeds remaining when the details of the deeds themselves are lost in tradition; but, in my humble opinion, your favourite hero lives in the remembrance of the peasants less for what he did for them than for what they have done for him, in the romantic version they have got amongst them of his mysterious

love passage with the peasant nymph, Mistel—there is the secret of Sigismondo's popularity!"

"What! who did you say was the original of this portrait?" I eagerly asked.

"Sigismond, fifth Count of Felstein," answered Juliet, "whom we would fain have thee represent!" and she moved away.

"Who moreover died for love," said Wilhelm, knocking his hand energetically on his heart, and following his instructress.

"He died young," rejoined Juliet. "But the silly people made up the rest: *that* was never true of any one." And, with her young companion, Juliet quitted the gallery.

"Sigismond, Count of Felstein, the lover of the beautiful Mistel!" I exclaimed. But to my dismay, I found that during the moment I had turned to Juliet, Hermia had vanished; and I was alone, standing opposite to him whose counterfeit I had presumed to make myself—the melancholy, dim, fading knight in the stiff school of Germany; and there was Hermia's copy, a mock upon the original—a small full-length from a half-life size; a literal copy—all but an original—young and life-like, the costume much of her own device.

"A capital likeness," said a voice behind me. I started from my stupefaction. It was the pro-

fessor who had sought me purposely to learn if I had changed my intention of quitting Felstein.



“One sees its resemblance to thee at the first glance, my boy,” pursued he, “though it is so fine; and by Jupiter! so art thou. Where is Juliet, did she get it done?”

Juliet, Hermia, Karl, Mistel, and Sigismond, were realities and unrealities, that came confusedly crowding together before me. Sigismond was Karl! Sigismond there was Hermia's! Was Hermia to be Mistel? and Mistel, Karl's?

CHAPTER VIII.

"It is a bridge that, reconducting to my former life, divides me and my heaven."

HERR MINERALISCH'S mission was successful. Throughout the long night was I unravelling the web that environed me. Now that Hermia was no longer before me, I had some difficulty to reconcile, to identify her with the enchantress of the forest. I had associated an idea of dominance of elevation above the changes and chances of mortality, the very reverse from Hermia's position. Yet now I knew her as my heart's idol, had she not ever appeared, by her lofty sentiments, her dignified self-possession, distinguished above all others? But yet in my thoughts she was as two persons. Would she explain those different characters?

Wherefore had she met me in the forest? Was it a masquerading custom? And where was her elfish attendant? Were any of the rest parties to the adventure? The thought of that made me indignant; but it was a very measured sort of indignation against her who was the centre of all my

hopes and aspirations. Yet must I not be carried away by impulses of the moment—I must be circumspect.

* * * * *

My bright dream of love was over. In a few brief days, all had gone the very reverse to my hopes. Hermia, contrary to her former encouraging, heard my protestation with embarrassment, even with coldness; evaded all question of an explanation; escaped, by the most wonderful means, my every attempted declaration; and finally avoided, systematically avoided me.

Who can tell my despair! I was in almost as much amaze; and if I tell you the truth, my self-love was wounded only in a less degree than was my heart; or, at least, surprise and chagrin sharpened my heart's wound. I who had been led to such opposite conclusions, to believe myself sought through magic sympathy; and just as I had been borne up to the height of happiness —

Hermia must love elsewhere; no otherwise might I explain the case. And, by all the powers of darkness, I was led to identify the object—you will never bring yourself to believe it!—no other than that young mischief, that forward, clever little wretch, Wilhelm! I had before noted their “thee” and “thou,” and had lately met them together in

the most absurdly confidential intercourse. I was well-nigh choked with rage and anguish: he, that child, preferred to — My disgust exceeded all bounds. Why had she met me, then, in the forest? Ah, a ray of light was lent by jealousy! it had all been perpetrated to try my supposed credulity, to mock my wild fancy, perchance to gratify an impish device of that wicked urchin. I will no more comment upon all I endured.

In marked contrast to all this was the signal friendliness of Juliet—all gladness, and extra conciliation, since my being won over to stay.

It was impossible to doubt *her* feelings; and, in pique and wounded love, I resolved to forget the cruel capricious Hermia, and dwell only on the certainty of Juliet's love and her many perfections.

Just endeavour to imagine, to feel the contrast. On one hand, coldness, avoidance, ingratitude; on the other, kind conciliation and sweetness where my first allegiance was due.

At this juncture I received another letter from my father, the most consistent, on common matters, I ever knew him to indite. It was full of Juliet's praise: her talents, our future happiness, and my enviable fortune in being the chosen of such an inestimable treasure. I was resolved this time there should be no degrading vacillation.

May you never undergo the heart-struggles I forced myself to suffer. I misinterpreted every feeling: the injured self-love that drove me from Hermia to Juliet I mistook for duty and honour. Several times I determined to lay before Juliet for her solution, the mysterious web that had been cast around me. But I could not bring myself to speak of Hermia, far less to utter any word that should, in the least degree, compromise her.

As for Wilhelm, nothing could exceed the careless triumph of his manner; and it might well be



so, for he was everything to everybody — to every

woman that is; the darling of the Countess his aunt, the object of Juliet's mispent petting instructions, that was ridiculous enough; and yet the relationship of the first, and the open popular manners of his instructress, made it consistent; but that the reserved Hermia should be so taken with his flippant cleverness was not to be conceived. Worse! I began to suspect, from an accidental hint of Juliet's, that with all his young innocence of look, which his art and insinuations so grievously belied, he was not, by a year or two, so young as he seemed.

With his youthful bloom and winning smile he reminded me of the serpent assuming the cherub. Indifferently did he dispense his attentions amidst his admirers, and ever met me with a covert smile of conscious superiority.

Juliet, I told you, loved to teach and to preach, and had been accustomed to give her attention to a succession of her father's scientific friends, whose condescending patronisings of her youthful ardour she delighted to pay off upon others; and Wilhelm was her tame spaniel, and there an end, every one was aware of the fact. The case was different with Hermia: she who dwelt or rather flitted about the castle like a winter sunbeam, as rarely seen as little imagined; she, so discreet and retiring, to be met

in the wooded paths around, intently conferring with him, familiarly hanging on the arm of this man-boy; and even displaying embarrassment at being so met; or accompanied by him to be seen going to and from the village on her errands of charity or friendship—this was too much! On the last occasion I had been returning from one of the solitary rambles, now my only solace, when I was made aware of their approach by the doffing of hats and curtsies of the villagers, which demonstrations of respect were returned by the Countess's nephew with an easy dignity, which I suspected was aimed at me, whom the people, by contrast, regarded only with looks of curiosity. It was mechanically that I lifted my hat to his muffled companion, whom my heart told me was Hermia.

If more was wanting to convince me of her absurd and amazing preference—it is with difficulty I tell it, and recall the sentiments it roused within me—the climax was reached by a third inopportune encounter. I came upon them at the angle of one of those intersecting paths of the castle gardens; and, even now I could scarcely credit my eyes! there was the young monster, whose height did not reach to that of his fair companion, clasping her slender waist, whilst her lovely hand rested on his shoulder in the intense interest of her communication. I

stood as though I were turned to stone, and the earth seemed gliding from beneath me, but in the midst of Hermia's eloquence I was unperceived, at least by her; for the ever-alert Wilhelm I suspected had caught a momentary glimpse of my scared figure—enough for him in the spirit of mischief,



which was his nature, to redouble the impressiveness of the scene, by the earnestness with which he seemed to hang on every word of his beautiful confidante.

Who was Hermia? what was her history? her birth? Did no one know, or care to learn? So it seemed—for upon my once intimating such inquiry to Wilhelm, who seemed to know everything, he gravely replied that it was a question no one ap-

peared able to answer, and which he advised me to refrain from pursuing, for that the people about were so superstitiously given to the marvellous, or to anything that might afford a promising source of gossip, that when once set upon the subject, they might in all probability employ their speculations, in proportion to the absence of information, to concoct something fantastic or injurious, as the case might be.

CHAPTER IX.

"It mocks my soul with charming witchery ;

• • • • •

It draws, it pulls me with a godlike power ;

And lo ! the abyss ! and thither am I moving—

I have no power within me not to move !"

It was the morning of Juliet's fête, or Christmas Masque, as she termed it.

It was just daylight as I crossed the corridor ; but on passing the door of the great hall, I thought I distinguished murmuring voices, and the tapping of a hammer from within. I was about to enter, when I perceived a man stationed there—one of the servants—who respectfully informed me that Mademoiselle Juliet and Herr Wilhelm were rehearsing, and had given orders not to be interrupted. Imagine how my bosom throbbed with anger. The intimation, however conveyed, that your presence may be dispensed with, is an infuriating circumstance ; the politer, the more disgusting. You don't in a hurry seek the society of your rebuffers. Yet, on this occasion, whether it was that I had caught the faint sounds of a dearer voice I cannot now distinctly tell you ; but I immediately decided to

confront my discouragers; to make the circuit of the castle, and take a survey in a manner that had been already pointed out to me. Quick as thought, I reached the stone-terrace, and passed along the windows. The nature of my sensations, and my lightning-like scamper, made me quite regardless of the biting morning air, of whose intenseness I only became aware by the state of the frosted windows, only just beginning to run into rivulets, which made all within the more indistinct. I heard the sounds of merriment—odious sounds to one, in malice prepose, excluded from participation—a clapping of hands, and Juliet's voice bravaing: the climax to some scene performing within. Without, I made as much stamping and shuffling as I could, to make myself evident, though my figure might have been distinguished by them.

As I expected, it was Juliet who unfastened and drew back the window for my entrance; and, overwhelmed with a sense of injury, I stalked into the room. My first feeling was of general disgust; but soon what I actually saw transfixed me with folded arms and mien of moody dismay to the spot. Oh, my prescient heart! Hermia was there! Let me describe the group. On the floor were piles of red-berried holly, and pale mistletoe, with which they had been decking Juliet's evergreen bower. The

cheeks of all three were flushed with their exertions, imparting a sparkle to the eye and a general air of enjoyment, which aggravated my gloomy dissatisfaction.

The whole room indeed was a bower; and from amidst the boughs gleamed exotics placed in brackets up the wall; though I saw but little of it all, except as a back ground to a picture that riveted my attention, as soon as I could accurately



discern, after the dazzle-ment of the frost without. Hermia was seated on a low seat at the entrance of the frost grotto, looking, oh! so like she did on our first mysterious meeting. Before her knelt—yes, knelt—that pampered, petted Antic, Wilhelm! He

was presuming to arrange around her brows a wreath of ivy and mistletoe, for which purpose she actually

bent forward her matchless head. His back was towards me. I could have crushed the little wretch!

So engrossed had they been, that Hermia was at first unaware of my arrival, for she now arose in manifest surprise. But Wilhelm, scarcely glancing at me, lightly laughed, and applauded his tasteful head-dressing. A mirror had shown him my approach, from perceiving which he had taken care to exclude Hermia's view; and there I stood, with fixed gaze, and heaving chest, and how hardly suppressed emotion! cutting a rather curious figure, I imagine.

"Karl," said Juliet, kindly taking my hand, "shall we not surprise every one? I will tell thee the final decisions respecting the arrangement of our characters. Have we not got on, Karl?"

"Yes," replied I, bitterly, and with a huge effort. Then casting a withering glance towards the acting pair, "Yes, things progress."

But Wilhelm had skipped off; though only to come capering through from the frost bower, in the somewhat startling semblance of a shaggy Bear. Again he was off, and speedily returned hopping in as an Eagle; and finally floundered along as a huge scaly Fish. It was impossible not to think it good. Beyond dispute the creature was provokingly clever,

and delighted enough both ladies seemed to be with him; but for such a being as Hermia to be won by such sallies!

"You perceive," said Juliet, when she could speak for laughing, "that Wilhelm must be Legion for our occasion, as no one on earth could assume the parts he does. You must know I have given up my idea of the Friar Tuck and English masquing set, and mean to personify the most prominent characters of our fatherland legends. This goodly company I shall, in my character of "Green Holly," bring to beguile "Grim Winter" in his cave opposite. Our "Phantom Barber" is Herr Henrich. Friederich and his sisters three are the *Baron* and his *three daughters*; whom the mercenary parent severally sold to sons-in-law Bruin, Dolphin, and Sir Eagle—the last trio by Wilhelm, who, you see, is already *au fait* in his changes of costume. Then we shall have "Libussa," and the many protégées of the great "Rübezahl," the lordly Gnome himself being Wilhelm's great character and creation!"

Saying which Juliet proceeded to indicate our different stations in the pageant, and display the arrangements of bower and cave. The last was paved with a white substance, resembling snow. Bare mossy branches set off the frost-capped summit, from which hung numerous glass icicles, devised with art-

ful ingenuity. Behind some dead boughs was concealed the doorway leading into the Countess's study, which was Wilhelm's tiring-room, and most convenient exit and entrance.

"For from out this wild cave," said Juliet, "will appear all the ungainly characters—such as Gnomes, bears, dwarfs, etc., of our land of Faëry."

While Juliet further described, Wilhelm anticked about, illustrating all her descriptions for their entertainment or his own; though Juliet failed not to admonish, correct, and amend his conceptions, which seemed perfect in the admiring eyes of the infatuated Hermia.

She had resumed her seat within the cave to look on. Juliet's glee and earnestness were those of a child. Angry with myself for the dumb, stupid part I was playing, I made a violent endeavour to sympathise in her anxious delight; to respond to the friendly advances of her unabating good humour. Against Juliet every particle of indignation was mollified, which rose in proportion towards her ungrateful protégée. Her I would show how the devotion she spurned was welcomed by another; and that other, the Queen of so many hearts—the lady of the the Festival. Juliet's smiles should disperse to air my love for Hermia, as the sunbeams pierce the morning mists.

Now did I praise Juliet's taste, her brilliant conceptions; I prophesied the success of her Masque, made extravagant allusions to her all irresistible power, and indirectly spoke my ardent admiration. Her wishes should be my guide, her commands my law! At that instant the castle band gently, yet suddenly, wafted to our ears the exquisite air, "Deukst du daran,"—one of those songs whose tones, and even words, have so marvellous a facility of adjusting themselves to the thoughts of the hour, in their countless diversities, so as to appeal to every present exigency of feeling. Thus it seemed at this moment. It startled all of us. The eyes of each sought those of the others, as if we all would read each other's thoughts, unthinking of the tell-tale emotion that burnt across our own brows. By an electric affinity, Hermia's eyes and mine were bent on each other, to be as speedily withdrawn. Juliet had just thrown over me an enveloping mass of dark woollen drapery, in which she must see my personification of "Winter," who, at the approach of herself and myrmidons, was to throw off those wrappages, lay aside his quaking mien, and appear in holiday guise. Incited by my mood of mind, by Juliet's praises, and by the music, I endeavoured with great animation to give my idea of the part; suggesting various hints, which Juliet applauded

with rapture; when suddenly I thought of asking who was really to perform that character.

"Oh, thou wilt know in due time, Karl," she replied; "perhaps my father, perhaps Hermia—it is one of my masquing secrets. But, Karl, do go on, for I am expecting Herr Henrich soon back. He is gone to meet Friederich, and the three girls; having promised me to instruct them coming along in what they will have to do in our masque; for Heaven knows, when they once come amongst us and our preparations, how long it will be before their frantic delight and curiosity will subside, and their understanding be restored! So, as thou hast at length condescended to give one thy advice, continue, pray."

I appeared, indeed, or would fain appear, to live but for her. I know not what possessed me. I was as an actor, who, carried away by the enthusiasm of the hour, identifies his own being with the part he plays. While shadowing out fresh conceptions, and admiring Juliet's, urged on by her delight, and at a request from her, (perceiving, too, that Hermia's eyes were fixed on me,) I thenceforth launched forth into a *con amore* picture of the Fairy region Felstein itself might become, and especially the surrounding scenery of its domain, beneath the poetical hand of taste. Juliet listened with singular interest. A bright

flush was on Hermia's cheek—*that* I could perceive; and instantly imagined her genius borne along with the description so much in accordance with her beautiful art. What a glow was added to my fancy! My eloquence mounted high, and was mingled with all sorts of implied allusions to the harmony of United Souls amidst the loveliness of Nature, drinking in the beauty of the outward world and of each other's Thoughts by shaded path and bushy knoll, that might look down on the dreamy earth beneath. I addressed it all to Juliet; but I thought of Hermia—only of her—as I proceeded to animate my picture of the actual, with my favourite tenants of the unseen world—who owned such fellowship with her, while yet the fervour of the moment lent intensity to the hand-grasp, and the glance that was fixed on Juliet.

O falsehood! O disguise! how far may ye bear us away, and away, by thy tortuous windings, before we are warned of the abyss, which ye take care to conceal till we are close upon its brink! Oh, what had I not given the next minute never to have been beguiled into thy evil paths!

Even Wilhelm had stayed his antic career to listen to my fairy-land imaginings. Each must have been more riveted by them than I was myself—(ah! for my enthusiasm was but half sincere!)—for, strange

to say, my eloquence was arrested suddenly by sounds which were unnoted by all the rest. Hermia and Juliet were both resting from their labours within the grotto, against the entrance of which I leaned, while apparently addressing Juliet, when a singular noise above my head put an end to my improvisation. All were in danger. The lofty roof of the fanciful structure, with its dreadful impending icicles, was falling in. Not a second did I reflect; but, madly darting forward, snatched the unsuspecting Hermia in my arms, and bore her to safety. Scarcely did Juliet and Wilhelm comprehend speedily enough to follow my example, when, with a crash, there was a heap of ruins beneath, and a wide gap in the roof above. All were dismayed, breathless, and silent for a moment; the next, Wilhelm, after assuring himself of Juliet's safety, hastened to where I had deposited the pale and trembling Hermia, finding it necessary to reassure her by the gentlest consolations; then, with an earnest impressiveness I found to be yet more gratuitous, he actually thanked me for what I had just done; declaring that, had it not been for my presence of mind, there was no answering for the serious, perchance fatal consequences of the accident.

The first rapturous gratitude of the moment past, I was recalled to myself by the dread of encounter-

ing the reproachful looks of the neglected, deserted Juliet. It was a great relief to my accusing conscience to hear her the next moment, first lamenting grievously over the ruins; then vigorously fall to scolding Wilhelm as the author of the mischief; clearly showing that it had all arisen from his neglect, or mathematical ignorance, at the time she had left him to supervise the work-people, during her absence from the castle, when he had especially undertaken to attend to that very roof which had like to have tumbled about their ears, etc. Wilhelm exculpatorily urged the masses of snow, otherwise ponderous bay salt, which she—Juliet—*would* have added to *his* original sprinklings on the roof, besides mosses, ferns, and bare stems; and gently alluded to her planning of those sharp murderous icicles, and to those heavy blocks of ice, likewise her invention, which really might possibly have brought on the catastrophe.

He was cut short by the peremptory order to see immediately about the repairing of the damage, to which was subjoined a further lecture upon mathematical calculations, which he must this time patiently consider, with unremitting watchfulness, in order to counterbalance his former neglect.

I stood apart, wrapt in more than my former gloom during all this time, when I started to per-

ceive Hermia advancing towards me, with slow unequal steps. She held out her hand to me, which I received in the same spirit of profound injury.

"Will you not accept my thanks," she began, "my thanks, Karl,"—I turned away from the beguiler,—“for having saved, perhaps, so worthless a life. The thought that it is not entirely so in thine eyes, is”—I turned towards her—“thou knowest not how dear to me!”—I was touched.—“Think of me, Karl, think of me kindly, should we be strangers during our future lives. Try—endeavour—” how my ears strained lest my beating heart should drown her faltering soft accents.

“What means Hermia?” I demanded, with forced composure.

“That thy fairest thoughts should follow her,” she replied, with downcast looks.

“And may we never meet again?” I asked, with all the calmness I could assume.

“Yes, once!” she replied, looking up with that smile—that gracious irradiation of lip and eye, whose beams I had before encountered—in which lurked hope, love, and a glimmer of womanly coquetry, which puzzled, piqued, encouraged, and finally left one in a state of bewilderment and doubt and ecstasy, which in my present state of feeling was beyond control.

"Great Heaven! once and for ever, Hermia!" he exclaimed. "Yes, we must be strangers or everything to each other! Oh, drive me not to madness! Trifle no longer with an adoring heart! Who, whatever thou art, let me know my fate!"

"This evening, Karl," she whispered in a soothing tone.

My vehemence had indeed startled myself into the recollection of the presence of those whose very existence was before totally forgotten; and had been even now unheeded had it not been for the sudden revulsion suggested by the thought of Wilhelm. Was she born for our mutual torment?

In desperation I followed the singular being now about to glide away; who never broke upon one but to dazzle, delight, and leave one in utterest darkness; whose story was a mystery; whose existence an illusion, a meteor: but an illusion dearer than the most absolute reality!

"This evening we shall meet," she repeated, as I endeavoured to detain her, "and thou shalt know all! Now, farewell!"

She was about to disappear.

"But what certainty, delusive Hermia, what assurance shall I have for the performance of thy promise?" I vehemently asked, as I sprang to the door by which she would have effected her escape.

“ Mortal maid or spirit of earth, peasant or peri, tell me—who am only thine—what security I shall have for thy presence, by what token I may know thee?”

“ By thine own heart!”

“ Ah! if it may be mirrored in thine eyes, through mine.”

“ Mine will be veiled; but the token shall be—the Mistletoe Branch!”

CHAPTER X.

"Each one tripping on his toe,
Shall be here with mop and mow."

I SHOULD know all! that was the sole thought that occupied me, from the moment I rushed forth from all chance of social communion till the arrival of the longed-for evening. That evening hour came, as all hours must, even should they be almost indefinitely delayed by being dwelt upon and desired.

Oh! could I have cast into oblivion the remembrance of Wilhelm, and have annihilated my conduct of that morning to Juliet, how bright had been my anticipations. Deeply wronged, and noble Juliet! She received all the guests with a charming air, from her dais within the bower. Her spirits were high and happy as the occasion could be fitted with. Throughout the day, her humour had been gratified to the utmost, not only by having Wilhelm to lecture all the morning, but also by the arrival of the amiable family of the brother and sisters, who must

be drilled, and tutored, and taught, to the full occupation of her amazing powers that way. To see her thus was indeed a balm to my accusing conscience. Yet I might have concluded it but excitement, a veil, a cover assumed, as had been my morning's brilliancy, to conceal deeper feelings, had I not long before received the following wondrous little charm in the form of a tiny billet:—

“ Set thy doubting, anxious heart at rest! Neither Juliet's love, nor the love of Wilhelm, interfere with thine—only the humbleness of its object. *Command thy feelings* above all things! Be the grave Sigismond of the portrait gallery, and expect yet seek not thy Mistel!”

Juliet's figure was perfect in her fête robe of glistening white, embroidered in wreaths of green and scarlet holly. From amidst her dark hair shone a garland of golden holly leaves, whose clustered berries were exquisitely counterfeited in red coral. Some rubies which fastened back her emerald green tunic, (I fancied I had seen them before,) completed her costume; with which her bright cheek and brighter eyes were in perfect harmony. She was truly the lady of the fête, and, as it seemed of all hearts—all but one, which but misgave at the

increased amiability of her manner towards it. I stood near her, amidst the motley fairy group that



waited on her, and had the satisfaction of seeing each guest unmask for her especial gratification, as they all in turn exchanged greetings with their lovely hostess. But in vain I strained my eyeballs in search of the brightest eyes in the world, or for wreath, or smallest spray of Mistletoe! It hung in masses above my head, and lay near my heart, as it had continued to do ever since that eventful evening when I had first pressed it there; but I desried it not where I now sought it.

“Sigismond!” said Juliet to me, in an interval of the stream of introductions; “and thou, Sir Phantom, Prince of Barbers,” she continued, turning to Henrich, “should either recognise our fair lady Countess amidst our motley scene, make no impressement in paying your devoirs, for it is her pleasure to be incognito at her own fête, and amidst her own guests; and indeed there is small fear for her, as of the crowds of persons you have seen pass by scarcely one is personally acquainted with our eccentric recluse.”

“Ha!” exclaimed Henrich, “the fair Countess! will she vouchsafe her gracious and graceful presence?”

This was not the first time I had observed this forced enthusiasm of manner of Herr Henrich's, in reference to the lady of Felstein, which I could not

but think rather aimed at her brilliant possessions than her bright eyes. I now remembered a former odd allusion of Juliet's.

"Sigismondo!" said a shrill voice near me, that made me start with undefinable reminiscence, "how glorious we look in our tall plumes! Ha! who knows not what fine feathers may do! when some are such dullards as not to know the same bird in an altered plumage!"

This address came from a lady-like green domino, whom I was not so dull as not to recognise after the surprise of the first moment. According to the injunction of my billet, I had made up my mind to bear much unmoved.

"And what a green of faëry is *she*," continued the whispering tormentor, over my shoulder. "A pattern pair ye make, to all appearances—*appearances* in truth!" The mocking allusion was to Juliet and myself,—“for there is nothing else in common between thee and this tripping Princess of a moonlit glen;—aye, look!” Juliet was indeed more dazzling than I had before imagined her;—“Look, though thou couldst overlook her for the pale Mistletoe! Look, though thy chance of grace with the bright Holly is past for ever! Her thoughts are with another.”

I turned suddenly, at this doubtful assertion.

“Another!” vehemently asseverated the mask;
“She will none of such a Waverer!”

The sparkling eye and undisguised energy of manner discovered to me, even had I not before detected the feigned voice of my undeviating persecutor, the eternal and ubiquitous Wilhelm!

“We shall meet again; and then thou wilt hail with unfeigned pleasure, which will be very natural for thee, the renewal of thy acquaintance with Green Domino!” was all the satisfaction I could get, as, darting after him, he melted in the crowd away. Juliet now uttered my name. In a minute or two after, I was made aware that I was still a very principal object of Wilhelm’s malice, or exuberant humour, being awakened from the abstraction I had fallen into by a shock from the loving contact of brother Bruin’s shaggy coat. To describe all the antics of these animal transmigrations would be next to impossible; and I was most incompetent to do justice to his diverse evolutions. I knew that he was the life of the assembly, and sufficiently determined was he that I should be alive to the fact; flapping his eagle wings in my face, and disturbing the equilibrium of several that were around me by his piscatory plungings and springs. Yet every fresh absurdity from the Countess’s nephew was hailed with delight and applause. His three princesses

severally received his mute though somewhat rough endearments with complacency; and the universal *éclat* of his performances inspired him to aggravated oddities: the whole being brief and brilliant, as a phantasmagoria, while the airs played were solely appropriate to his personations.

It was now that Juliet gave the signal to her myrmidons; and for the first time were fully developed the picturesque groups of legend and fairy-land that filed from out the Evergreen Bower in her train. In the centre of the hall, we were met by frost-girt Winter, trembling and shivering beneath his rugged, snow-dripping bears' skins. His demeanour was much after the pattern I had pre-figured in the morning. I was rather curious to know who he might be, recalling Juliet's mystery about the matter. The enormous masses of rough drapery thrown aside at the winning approach of Green Holly, a figure was discovered in a voluminous robe of red cloth, high conical hat, and a well-painted mask of a jocund expression, ornamented with silver hair, and finished off with a lengthy white beard. I was at a loss. Could it be Wilhelm? No; there he was—a glorious Rübezahl, intently inspecting his bunch of turnips! Upon the transformation, there was a hearty hand-grasp between erst Grim Winter and Green Holly; whereat the

quaint or diablerische throng led on by the grey-beard took to shaking hands right cordially with the faries, nymphs, and royal personages of the Evergreen Court. This was the more absurd from its being unexpected. You may imagine I received a hearty squeeze from Wilhelm, who indeed originated the movement, as it was merely intended for the two parties to meet, and pair off for the waltz with appropriate partners, and so to conclude the more dramatic part of the entertainment. After the friendly greeting, there was accordingly a whirl of Gnomes and Nymphs—Spirits of air and Goblins of the mine. I alone of the legendary group found myself without a partner. Juliet conducted her's to the Evergreen Bower, where they stood at the entrance, as offering courtesies to each other; while Juliet's glance wandered over the scene to ascertain if any one was to be set to rights. She, who perceived everything, immediately saw my case, and beckoned me towards her. At the same moment, the sprite Rübezahl gave over his measured meanderings, as he well might, from fatigue of his former exertions. But no such thing; for, after turning the tables upon all ancient record of his prototype, by himself abandoning the pale girl personating his fanciful, deviceful, first love, and transferring her to a less mercurial adorer, he skipped up to Juliet;

and with utter disregard for the fitness of things, as for most things else, made ready unceremoniously to whirl off with her without reference to her present partner.

"Karl," said Juliet, hurriedly, "a change of partners seems about to be effected, and thou must do the honours of the Evergreen Bower. The first lady present would permit thee that honour," she continued, in a rapid whisper, followed by a pantomimic introduction between the red-robed figure and myself, "*remember that, Karl.*" And as though resistance were out of the question, Juliet resigned herself to be whirled away by the clearly irresistible Wilhelm, who in the short sharp laugh, as of triumph at the fresh mystification heaped upon me, became more than ever the beau ideal of the vain mischief-loving "lord of the hill."

Never was man in a more awkward position. The first lady *present*! that must be the Countess—one had heard that sufficiently often; (if indeed Juliet had not intimated an opinion of her being the first lady in the *world*;) as well as of her misanthropic habits, so unaccordant with the present state of things. The recluse, nun-like lady of Felstein standing before me in such a Masquerade! It was but passing attention I gave to the inference which Juliet's words evidently intended to convey.

Did the strange figure intend to follow the waltzers with my devoted self? Rather embarrassed at first, when I found my companion decline the dance, and return but a bowing acknowledgment to the common-places I might utter, I shortly fell into my former occupation of watching, and narrowly scanning each passer by, in hope, in ever-fleeting, ever-recurring hope of my promised Token! All other things I forgot in the intenseness of the one interest. How was I startled the next instant to feel a gentle pressure on my hand. I turned suddenly; was it possible that the supposed lady, so strangely introduced to me, was quickly withdrawing the hand that had lately clasped mine? I stood amazed; and while hesitating whether I should follow the retreating figure of the mysterious one, while the crowd was intervening between us, Wilhelm passed, and touching my arm, whispered me, with a look that made up for the suppression of the usual sharp tones, "Some men are ever Star-gazing, and so behold not what lies scattered at their Feet!"

Mechanically were my eyes cast downwards; my head swum, and my power of discernment seemed betraying me, when I perceived at my feet a spray of Mistletoe!

CHAPTER XI.

"She's mortal;

But by immortal Providence she's mine;

I chose her, when I could not ask my father

For his advice!"

It was Hermia, then—Hermia, by whom I had been standing, here on this very spot, with such obtuse unconcern—such impenetrable undiscernment! Maddening remembrance! Juliet had wilfully deceived me. The Countess?—no, but "the first lady present." Ah! was not Hermia first in beauty and in gifts! Oh dull-souled interpretation—earthly blindness! With this distracting conviction, instantaneous as light, I snatched up the Mistletoe, and was darting away in pursuit of her who had left the token, when I perceived twisted amongst its leaves a tiny paper; and, forgetting the whole assembled company, I approached a lamp near at hand, the better to decipher the fairy characters writ thereon. They were as follows:—

"ADIEU, KARL! Thou art beloved by one who will confer on thee the sole dignity that could be so

bestowed. Thy lovely visions of the morning, in the realms of poetry and the picturesque, may all be realized. She loved thee e'er thou camest—has loved thee since—will ever love thee; and could have sacrificed her love, had such been for thy happiness. Juliet no longer refuses to have all cleared up, and will herself explain whatever may have seemed mysterious. For thy own sake and for mine be guided *only by her*; and though thou wilt not again behold, thou wilt think upon the humble

“HERMIA.”

Hermia had kept her word, then, to sink me into the depths of despair. Juliet (oh remorse!) loved me! my prescient misgiving was but too well founded. And could Hermia be gone? I was about to ascertain this fact by any and every imaginable means, when Juliet stood by my side; and taking my arm with kind familiarity, brought to my mind all the impressive assurances I had just received of her devotion. I shuddered at her approach, and the thought of the wrong I had done her!

“Karl,” she said, in her usual manner, “I think I may divine something about that Awful Billet. Thy affairs seem being managed by thee but indifferently. Perhaps I may help thee to a better arrangement—come.” She led the way through the grotto,

within whose recesses she seated herself, motioning me to do the like.

"And thus lightly can she conceal the injuries of a heart it has been my wretched fate to wound, perchance to break!" was my miserable reflection, as I followed her example, with what feelings you may imagine. "She whom all eyes seek, on whose account I am even now an object of such general envy—such being the deceitfulness of appearances;" and "Oh, that I was ever born!" were the uttered exclamations of my overcharged heart.

"Come, Karl," said Juliet, compassionately; "the dawn is oft at hand, remember, when the gloom seems deepest."

"Her words!" I exclaimed. "Oh, Juliet, canst thou ever forgive the part I have played? Could the devotion of a whole life suffice to ——"

"I confess I should like to see thee less erratic, more consistent," she rejoined, so much in her old teaching tone that it astonished me; "but we must take thee as thou art. And then there have been faults on both sides; and thou hast but repaid our mystifying by a little easily seen through deceptiveness. Forget it all, and be happy!"

"But canst *thou* forget? Oh, Juliet, I must unfold to thee the history of my heart!"

"I know it all, Karl!"

“ Ah, thou must know further, before I can offer thee the—the—devotion of my future ——”

“ Offer me, Karl! Is that yet thy delusion! Are our hints yet unavailing to explain the higher happiness awaiting thee?”

“ Thou lovest me not, then; Hermia is deceived! Best Juliet, friend of my early years, knowest thou where is Hermia? Oh, tell me wherefore this unhappy mistake—this dreadful farewell.—Where may I find Hermia?”

I placed the note in her hands. She looked at me in surprise, and a half smile.

“ It is all true,” she said, glancing at the letter; but is it possible you mistake the object? She says truly, Hermia thou wilt never see again. *My* heart, let me assure thee with every solemnity that may suffice to chase forth the vain prepossession, is safe and entire—despite the *danger* thou yet tremblest for. She who loves thee is she who left thee the note and the token.”

“ Surely these must be more tricks of Wilhelm's. *Him* I will seek out and force to an explanation!” I arose, and was about to rush wildly in search of the delinquent.

“ Karl, stay—listen! Thou hast just proved that thou mayest be deceived: conceiving thyself endowed, as the heroes of our modern romance, with a

spell for every woman's heart. Thy dear father, and thy romantic self, dwelling upon some suggestive talk that of old transpired, have woven in your imaginative brains a romance of a Cradle Betrothal, very apposite in a fairy tale. Notwithstanding which, the Hero of the fiction is the first to mar the integrity of his own plot, by groaning and struggling to be free of the bargain; but cannot conceive the possibility of the Heroine not giving her all for nothing in exchange, or doing other than waste and pine for what she never possessed—the love of the said Hero. But this same Heroine, incredible to relate, little charmed with her first experience in love's court, altogether declines playing the heroine. But enough of her. Fortune, honour, power, all await thee—the gift of Her who so truly loves thee; and yet her high soul regrets she must likewise include—herself. All else she would ——”

“Juliet,” said I, interrupting her, having heard but half the former harangue, “hear me, Juliet. Where is Hermia?”

“Canst thou not conceive thou art not again to see Hermia? We spoke of another!——”

“And I think only of Hermia!”

“And but now offered thyself elsewhere?”

“Under a delusion—a misconception! All humble acknowledgment for thy kind intentions, Juliet; if

indeed some new Mock, some fresh chicanery is not intended. But I am Free. From thee alone I could receive the assurance—thy lips have proclaimed it; and, for the first time since I knew Hermia, I feel I am Free—Free to offer my whole, free, unshackled heart where it has long been bestowed.”

I felt a very indescribable sort of indignation against Juliet, not only for the calm way in which she sought to dispose of me, but for her coolness when I had dreaded only the fervour of her devotion, which, strange to say, piqued me after all I had undergone from the apprehension of her imagined affection. I confess this, not justify it to you.

“Thanks, Karl, for your Ecstasy on the occasion,” said Juliet, her eyes sparkling.

“Juliet, I conjure thee by the remembrance of our infant years, by the friendship of our parents—thou who must know how devotedly my heart is attached—tell me all thou knowest of Hermia!”

“Hermia!—a Will-o’-wisp, who *was* here, and now is not! was nowhere where one sought her, and everywhere where one did not expect her. Whence she came, no one knows; whither she is gone, few will guess, or care to inquire. A creature of ——.”

“Stay, Juliet,” interrupted I, angrily; “use no ill epithets of her who is dearer to me a thousand times than all the world beside. I will seek

Wilhelm—he shall give me an account of all. He knows—He is the head of all mischief, the origin of all my torment.”

It was truly a relief to find some one upon whom to expend my anger and despair. I suspected I know not what of mystery and foul play. Perplexed and embarrassed by Juliet's dark hints and incredible half disclosure, at the thought of Wilhelm arose all my former anguish of doubt and jealousy; it blinded me to the mock seriousness of Juliet's tone, to the benevolent encouragement of her looks, and to the remembrance of the sweetness of her nature, and especial kindness for the object of her assumed disdain. I broke from her almost furiously.

“Stay!” cried Juliet, with unwonted eagerness, starting up as I laid my hand on the door of the anti-room close by, hoping to escape that way; “one instant, Karl, stay!”

I was obliged, for the door was locked, and Juliet stood to bar my exit through the grotto.

“More Plots,” muttered I, in suppressed rage.

“Karl,” said Juliet, singularly agitated, if not frightened, while an hysteric burst of tears showered from her bright eyes on to her embroidered robe, “this is my Fête, these are my guests, and thou my old especial Friend. Do not be the single one to distress, to thwart my humour on such an occasion:

Promise me but to be guided by the injunctions of that cherished billet. She who loves thee, waits to see thee. Despite her generous intentions towards thee, thou canst not refuse a lady's commands—the commands of more than one lady interested in thy welfare; and I desire, I entreat thou wilt follow me, and catechize and abuse poor Wilhelm afterwards."

Moodily enough I remained, and suffered myself to be guided by her, as she advanced to the door. It flew open on her touching a spring. She remained for some moments with her hand on the lock, as though to recover from the unusual excitement of my vehemence, while she rapidly uttered, her smiles breaking through her powerfully suppressed tears—

"Now promise me, Karl, thou wilt not for the future think every woman who is entertained by thee, or even interests herself in thy welfare, deeply gone in love with thee; not that thou must expect to meet with many who will be at all the pains I have for thee. Trust me, Karl, in this world one meets with few friends who really trouble themselves for us; how blind and perverse, then, to disallow their good offices. It was wrong, Karl, truly wrong, through chagrin or for the sake of testing the Beloved's affection, to play at devotion, and perpetrate

scenes of such touching though fitful adoration around a heart that might by possibility *not* have detected the shallow *pretence*, and felt that, spite of *words* and *glances*, aye, and *handgrasps*—which last was the wickedest thing I know—the animating soul was away. But I forgive thee, and will make thee happy!”

Her manner was gradually restored, and her looks reassured me. “Make me happy!” Could one so clear-minded mistake the way, or voluntarily assist in hurling me to despair.

“Yes, happy, Karl,” she went on; “and this moment. But own it is well for me not to be one of the damsels of romance, ever waiting ready primed and prepared to be in love with the first Hero obliging enough to assume the part—as the proper preliminary of their histories, the first occupation of life. Own it is well, in my unpropitious case, that I had enough to do beforehand; for what with all my late private business, in addition to the necessity of keeping up with the seven-leagued times, let me tell thee, Karl, I have had no single moment for that idle unguarded precipitation called *Falling in Love!*”

This characteristic harangue of lecture and encouragement quite succeeded in restoring the smiles and calmness of my Mentor.

"Then Henrich Brown!" I ventured to utter.

"Oh, the vanity of the man! Fancying, like all his sex, that he may not possibly be resisted unless one's heart is steeled against his entrée—pre-occupied by another image. No, Herr Henrich sighs at another shrine; if we haste not, he may scent out our tête-à-tête."

My heart fell; but, between hope and curiosity, I resigned myself to her guidance.

Just as Juliet was permitting the long-barred entrance through the door of the adjoining room, it was flung wide, a female Mask stood in the centre, and I found myself rather roughly seized, just as I recognised the green domino of the everlasting Wilhelm.

"No violence, Karl—a Friend," whispered Juliet.

In the same shrill half whisper that had startled me in the beginning of the evening was uttered in my ear—

"Thou hast sought for us vainly
In hall and in tower;
Thy thoughts have pursued us
In Mirth's blythest hour;
But thy seeking is over,
Thy foot in our bower.

While the noble and courtly
Pay court to the fair,
N 2

Mortal man ! let the vision
Provoke no despair !
For thy seeking is over,
Thy Mistel is *there* !"

During this time the green hood had been allowed to fall back, and discovered the peasant cap, and skilful disguise of the climbing Maid of the forest, such as she had appeared on that eventful eve ! Then I remembered the bewildering associations that had more than once been suggested by that peculiar shrill intonation of Wilhelm's. Oh, what mystification I had saved myself, had I before identified the spritish tricksiness of the Boy, with the elfly demeanour of that pranking Damsel !

You may imagine I took no time to dwell on the discovery ; *that* was impossible, for as the peasant Maid withdrew her ungentle embrace, I beheld by the light of the single silver lamp, depending from the ceiling, seated within the room—the matchless figure of my Love, like a white cloud tipped by the moonbeams, exactly as she had appeared to me on the night in the forest—her snowy drapery was finished round the throat and arms by a starry circle of diamonds. The web was unravelling. Could I have doubted the form, the golden brown hair, braided off the temples, and adorned by a wreath like Juliet's, only that in place of the scarlet holly

there was Mistletoe berries of clustered diamonds; this and the contour of head had proclaimed my Hermia, for her face was eclipsed by a black velvet mask. Had other assurance been wanting, it was afforded by the promised token—the spray of Mistletoe hanging from her white hand !



“ Sigismund ! behold thy Mistel, whose coming has been this evening promised thee ! ” said the seeming *Mädchen* ; “ and behold her who promised thee

another meeting, and foretold thy pleasure on the occasion."

"The Mistel of the evening, Karl," put in Juliet. "But, masquerading apart, let me remind thee I have fulfilled my promise, by again introducing thee (so reluctantly on thy part) to the *first* lady of the assembly—she I spoke of to thee—the Countess of Felstein!"

I could but smile during these harangues, as bending before my dear one, I seized the token and the hand that held it.

"My Mistel of the evening, my Hermia for ever!" I breathed forth. "Oh, couldst thou imagine the pangs thy cruelty has given me only this evening, thou wouldst at once assure my longing heart of all it pants to hear."

"Karl, Karl!" cried Juliet, interrupting me, "be not frantic; address not the Countess by a name which I tell thee once again thou wilt never need to use more. That erratic Damsel who bore it—if damsel she were, and not a show, is—But I must devote myself to my guests, who are by this time regarding my absence with consternation. Friedrich and Herr Henrich, in right of their part in our grand fairy scena, will be seeking me in this tiring room, or taking me for another erratic Hermia. Stay not long any of you!"

And away she tripped. Wilhelm stood hesitating for an instant, as doubtful whether he should go with Juliet, or stay where he was. His superhuman spirit of mischief triumphed, and impelled him to the last course. I scarcely heeded him, as I continued to pour forth my soul to Hermia.

“What the man can possibly mean,” he broke in shortly, “by addressing the Countess, my good Aunt, as that silly *ignis fatuus* Hermia, or Artist, as she called herself, is beyond my understanding! She is gone never to return, melted into Air, trooped home, if local home she has.” (I smiled only incredulously.) “Nay, if thou creditest not that ’tis my Aunt, I swear that She and I, no other twain it was, did you the honour of rehearsing our parts before you, on the evening of the 15th of December just passed.”

He was accompanying his asseveration with a gesture of grotesque suitability, that would have certified any one of his identity with the petulant Rübezahl, whose feats that evening had already rivalled those of his chronicled eccentricity, when the door leading into the grotto was opened. Wilhelm rapidly pointed to another door, leading into the corridor—escaping through which, with Hermia, as speedily as possible, I caught a glimpse of the gliding figure and red mantle of the Phantom

Barber, whose arrival Juliet had foretold, advancing curiously into the apartment we were quitting.

A ray of light—the whole light—was breaking in upon me. We were now in the midst of the crowd.

“Juliet then did not explain all,” said Hermia, turning to me in evident embarrassment, “unkind ——”

“She related much that then seemed incredible, the explanation of which seems yet more marvellous, my Hermia, if indeed ——”

“Have naught to say to him, Countess,” exclaimed Wilhelm, suddenly rejoining us, and familiarly taking her other hand, “if he persists in addressing you by the name of that Whiff and away ! Tell him ——”

“That Hermia is not,” she repeated, “because she never was ! She is melted away like a snow wreath ; as perchance will melt the vows of Karl, offered to an *imagined idol*, now resolved into an every-day countess, who will not enforce upon him those vows she received in another character—one which his own imagination elevated to poetry.”

“Nay, Countess, if indeed I have the honour of addressing the lady of Felstein,” answered I, happy yet irritated, flattered though piqued, “*my* imagination has been played upon by the fanciful conceptions of others. I feel yet unable to penetrate,

through the Web that has been so artfully woven around me."

"Poor Fly amidst rapacious Spiders!" groaned the audacious Wilhelm.

As many curious glances, and "Who was she?" and "Who can she be?" were sent after my fair companion, as erst after the real Mistel of the tale, Wilhelm affected to take all the admiration to himself; and emulating the humour of the Nymph's guardian Sprite, strutted along with mincing gait and conscious complacent looks; then suddenly, in picturesque contrast to such graceful bearing, would perpetrate some caper—unladylike, to say the least of it—to the utter confounding of all uninitiated beholders. His sportiveness no longer showed like disgusting forwardness, but seemed to me rather to become him. We reached the picture gallery, where Wilhelm made himself still more worthy my admiration by withdrawing himself, and assembling the few stragglers that had there strayed so far from the outposts of the waltzers, to hear an artistic lecture upon a diablerische picture by Hell Breughel, delivered by himself.

"A truce to all plots," said my companion, as she seated herself on a couch within the recess of the oriel window, and I followed her example. "My coadjutors have fine-drawn this, I fear, into some

malicious episodes of their own, to suit their respective despites; the which they will be best able to explain. But will you forgive me for my part, Karl?" and she extended her hand to me, while with the other she removed her mask; "for it is ended, and you see there is now no other left to play."

There was an indescribable mixture of dignity and graceful sweetness in this action. It was no longer possible I could doubt that the lady of Felstein and the artist were one; yet there was such a gulf in my mind, between the solemn stately Countess, as I had seen her in her Maria Stuart cap, and my gentle Hermia, that I could with difficulty connect the twain, till they were thus effectively blent by herself. Eagerly I looked into the sunlight of those eyes—beneath them my heart expanded. Every other thought was chased away—even curiosity was in abeyance—as seizing her hand, and raising it to my lips, "Oh, adored one," I said, "all—all I have suffered is a thousand times repaid by this blissful moment!"

She was about to replace the odious mask, but the smile with which the action was prefaced, emboldened me to seize and possess myself of the black eclipse. I know not how long I was pouring forth my heart, and listening to the music of her voice,

when we were interrupted by the approach of a third person. It was Juliet. In an instant my beloved started up.

“Helen, lose no time in making thy escape. Herr Henrich has somehow traced thy disguises; and in his *phantom* guise is gliding after thee, whose shadow he would fain be. Thy presence is buzzed about.”

“In a white Domino, if we meet again,” she hurriedly repeated.

“No, no, Sir Sigismond!” continued Juliet, “thou stay’st with me, Sir Ingrate.”

The Countess had vanished.

“Now thou knowest what a friend I have been! Now thou must repent thy late usage of me! Longing for further information too? The thing was of my arrangement. Said I not true, that she truly loved thee? Said I not true, “*The first lady present?*” and did she not proclaim herself thy Love by the promised token? Oh, dull of heart! that must force her to confess herself and her love, or what she mistakes for such, in the compunctious visitings of a tender conscience for keeping thee from what she persists in deeming thy rights. For thou must know that Helen, Countess of Felstein, as romantic in her way as thyself, was sunk into a seeming insurmountable melancholy on my first acquaintance with her; a gloom fostered by her bringing up, and embittered

by the conviction that had sunk into despondency the overbearing spirit of her mother—the thought that she was but an usurper, and the ever-present idea of the irreparable wrong that had been committed in the angry destruction of the only document that could substantiate thy Felstein claims. I described thee—to whom she would ever recur—as well as I might: thy poetic temper, so wonderfully in harmony with her own. I next unfolded my plan, which at once seized upon her imagination—the details were of her own conception. As I told thee, her sole misgiving was the necessity of including the incumbrance of herself with all she would willingly have endowed thee with, unconditionally, at once and for ever. But, as I hinted, there was but one way of effecting this. Her whole nature has seemed changed since this prospect of disburdening her conscience of its heavyweighing load—light as a feather to any other, but insufferable to such a nature. She is an angel—all noble superiority to the world! all tenderness as regards its absurd contrarities, except in herself.”

Juliet paused in her breathless eloquence; then went on, e’er I could urge word or question.

“Ah, you little imagine her womanly scruples during the maturing of the Plot; the constant delaying of the crisis—ever, ever to be deferred; till she

decided she could best face it in the hurry and excitement of a scene like this."

"And that wonderful meeting in the forest, Juliet?"

"Oh, to the genius of the lady of Felstein, and to her deep-searching Knowledge of the world—in Books—thou must refer that, arranged and perpetrated in a sudden uncontrollable conviction of the certain failure of our lovely Scheme, in case of thy renewing acquaintance with thy old playmate, e'er thy imagination had received *another* impression. With the framing of that mad *escapade* I had naught to do, being too modest to see any such danger. The Aunt and Nephew have the honour of it, though they succeeded in pressing me into the service. Wilhelm has been an able adjunct throughout; but I can well fancy the heightenings and exaggerations his wild and wilful genius have surrounded the apparent mystery withal. At the same time, if I express my *undisguised opinion* I must say I think thou hast deserved it all; and even the Countess rightly served for her undeviating encouragement of his every humour and vagary. But 'tis her way to be all kindness and leniency to the flights and foibles of others; all harshness to her own, or what she deems such. In such wise has she fathomed and favoured thy prejudices; and having already spoiled

Wilhelm by humouring all his whims, what her unparalleled devotion is to make of thee, one may well dread to anticipate!"

I could only bow my thanks for this considerate apprehension, when Juliet proceeded—

"So wonderful a mixture of shrewdness and simplicity as she is, she sees little out of the way with the ordinary manners of the world in her proceedings. All her knowledge of men being gathered from her profound study of Schiller and Shakspeare, and such histories of adventure and conspiracy: for spite of the gloom cast over her early being, she is all enthusiasm and romance, though inheriting some of the reserve and despondency of her misanthropic, remorse-worn parent. Indeed, thou hadst more than once well nigh lost my sensitive friend. Rightly enough did she divine thou wouldst eschew the Countess, and herself determined she must be loved as the simple Hermia. A hundred times has she misgiven about the fancy of her Spirit Rival, but more so from thy fitful, oft-transferred devotion. Oh! had it not been for the most opportune accident of the morning, I will not answer for the result of it all; for, Karl, we consider not sufficiently the effect of ourselves and our demeanour on others; to cultivate imagination for such a purpose would indeed be good!"

I felt the reproof, and my upbraiding conscience resuggested suspicion of Juliet's sentiments, when my attention was directed to the advance of two persons close to where we were seated, who continued their walk without seeming to observe us. One of them wore a *white domino*! The height—all confirmed my impression. Her companion was Henrich Brown.

"Oh! most fair and noble lady! was it possible not to distinguish *you*!" he said. "One there was, at least, who at once penetrated thy triple disguise."

A low murmuring answer was returned, but the conference seemed to be getting more impressive. I immediately started up, though Juliet tried to prevent me. Was I to distrust my eyes! Was it my fate to be ever hurled from ecstasy to despair! Holding forth the black velvet mask, which before had been pressed to my heart and my lips—

"Madam," I said, scarcely able to command my utterance, "it was but e'erwhile you permitted me the honour of taking charge of *that* which you may now especially require."

The lady motioned to Henrich to take the mask, still continuing to hold her hood over her face. Something in the manner of this action caused me a sudden revulsion of feeling; at the same moment I received an impressive squeeze of the arm, that not

only put a period to a flow of bitter eloquence, but occasioned me considerable difficulty in suppressing an exclamation of pain at its powerful appeal, which like the reminiscent claw-scratch received by the misdoubting prince from his cat-love, restored me to confidence. I was glad not to have destroyed a joke, into whose gusto I could so entirely enter. Away went the Englishman and his supposed lady, whom you will guess was the arch-conspirator Wilhelm. By a rapid, expressive turn of his head he directed me to where stood the bright One, whose domino he had usurped—in a black mantle by the side of Juliet.

“You see,” said Juliet, “I was forced to fetch you, Countess, to keep him from mischief. In vain did I call upon him to stay where he was, so bent is he on plunging us into turmoil; there is no moment at which he can be left without the chance of his perpetrating some absurdity. And I must be gone to see that Wilhelm carries not his humour too far; but remember it is in a great degree your own fault, Helen, for having so outrageously fooled and fostered both their caprices.”

“Nevertheless, dear Juliet, permit us to accompany thee,” said the Countess; “for I confess to a certain curiosity to see how my counterfeit conducts himself. And he has so adroitly turned all suspicion,

by the sudden thought of assuming my domino, that we may do so without fear."

The Professor now came up, and seizing hold of me, "That boy will shortly make an end of one," said he, hurrying us along; "look! there is Wilhelm in every gesture; but his madly flattered companion discerns it not, which makes the thing so rich. I heard the boy awhile since gravely advise him to be particular in looking out for a *white domino*, worn by the fairest and noblest Fair; and a white domino he has been careful to provide for the expectant. Was ever anything like it!"

There in truth was Wilhelm, contriving the suitablest demeanour he could achieve for the occasion; while at every opportunity he would belie his assumed propriety of manner by some antic, each absurder than the last, whenever his companion's observation might be eluded, to the consternation of the many, and the unspeakable diversion of those who penetrated the design. At length, in one of the tenderest, and to both parties, most triumphant moments of the scene, while there was some little gentle altercation between the twain about the envious white hood, either by accident or design, the said hood got flung back, and the characteristic Rübezahl stood discovered! From the highest exaltation to the most unmitigated dismay, and

subsequent worse disgust, was the inevitable transition. It was Juliet who stepped forth to prevent the too potent overflow of such sentiments in the cheated swain.

"I am not answerable," said Wilhelm, with seeming contrition; "such a thing never entered into *my mind*."

"Whose then?" asked Henrich, eagerly, yet perceiving the absurdity of being angry.

"Simply because one has none," proceeded Wilhelm, gravely. "But well you know the vanity of attempting to resist the impulses of one's Cerebral Geography, that mountain sphere, of whose Dominance no one is better aware than yourself; and of which the Bump, but now exerting so powerful an influence, must be the Cimborazo."

"Rather the Chimpanzee organ," put in Juliet, "the direct inheritance from thy Simæ ancestors; whose propensities must be developed in thee, to the perfect satisfaction of Herr Henrich's very Complete Theory."

CHAPTER XII.

"Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
And what strength I have 's mine own!"

"AND so our fête is over," said Juliet, as she returned with Wilhelm from her last departing guests, and threw herself by the Countess's side, where we had been some time sitting within an all-commanding nook of the Evergreen Bower. "Our fête is over, and worse! our Beautiful Plot is brought to a close, with all the exciting scenes, and moving events emanating from it. Ah," and she sighed, "we must needs take up Herr Henrich and Young England, for even the frog and tadpole theory is worn out!"

"Ah," said Wilhelm, "I have just been aiding that Worthy and poor Friederich to the most tempting of my now disused tobacco, and have left them both vigorously smoking over their respective grievances!" and Wilhelm gave two piteous sighs, "that we might settle affairs amongst ourselves."

“That is good, Wilhelm ; I have likewise arranged the three girls to dream of their Protean adorer. But alas! Wilhelm, now that our conspiracy is ended, nothing is left to do or design. What is to be done ?”

“Not quite ended,” answered Wilhelm ; “all plots whatever end in a Wedding, or Broken Hearts. We are not to hope for any of the last ; let us keep up our spirits till the former gives note of future dulness ; there is hope till then.”

“Accept my congratulations, Karl,” said the Professor coming forward, after the silence that followed Wilhelm’s plain declaration ; “though for the paternal benediction, I prophesy it will take some years at least to make thy good father comprehend thou art not, and not likely to be married to Juliet. I can nevertheless be surety that thou refusedst my child in time ; but thou now seest I was right in reassuring thy apprehensions about the Broken Hearts Wilhelm has been speaking of.”

“Ah, you will have some difficulty in satisfactorily convincing him he has nothing serious to apprehend from the distraction of the deserted Juliet. But a short time since he began a most penitent apology for his conduct ; and it is a slight consolation to learn that he has endured even *more* from fear of the tenderness of one lady, than from

doubt of the kindness of another ! Poor Karl, thus much he confessed."

"And confess thou, Juliet," I broke in with animation, "that thy cruelty ~~has~~ been unparalleled, when a Look from thee had undeceived me on one head, a Word enlightened me on another, studiously forbearing to accord them ! That when others would have terminated the Plot, thou wast resolved to continue my torment ! That, coxcomb as I was to misinterpret thee from the first, thy clear mind perceiving the whole case, thy malign intent was to foster my hallucination, aggravate my distraction of soul, and lastly, that thy misleading complacency of this morning, and that Sigh thou wickedly gavest, were the cruellest things one could meet with !"

"Thou hast owned thy first illusion concerning me ; now then confess how far from complimentary, (although one *has* decided not to break one's heart for a man,) how little flattering to find him, out of pure Compassion, making the most convulsive efforts to conceal his heart's abstraction, the most grim spasmodic pretensions of heart-*less* devotion. Own that for such enormities revenge is too sweet to be resisted, when it may be compassed in the same coin. And, above all, confess my superior strong-heartedness in resisting thy formidable fasci-

nations, without a spark of predisposition * to protect me against them; when thou, with thy heart brim-full of *early affection*, scatteredst it all to the four winds of heaven upon the *first* gleam from the *first* pair of Bright Eyes that chanced to shed their beams upon thee! What a picture of Firmness and of Fickleness!"

"Leave off extorting confessions and making boasts," said Wilhelm, gravely. "Mademoiselle Juliet has been at a great amount of pains for Karl; and Karl has demonstrated a considerable degree of patience under it all, for which he owes her all the thanks in his power. And, in truth, his thanks are due to us all. One can conceive nothing prettier than the Mysterious History of which he has played the Hero: his own imagination could not have improved the fanciful circumstances surrounding it; and the glorious ground-work of Truth surpasses what is to be found in any romance. The intertwining of it all with the vague legend of Count Sigismond," he concluded, with a self-satisfied air, "was of my suggestion."

"Say not so, conceited Sir," interrupted Juliet. And after a little lecturing about exactness of terms and assertions, which could not but remind one of Rübezahl's famous argument with the wandering

* See Note on opposite page.

Professor of the healing art, about the respective claims to priority of the Acorn and the Oak—Juliet proved very convincingly that though Wilhelm had originally related the Legend, she had first conceived its late Ingenious Application, though some silly details were certainly of his own unassisted fancy.

“At all events,” said Wilhelm, after being brought, with all humility, to bow to Juliet’s statement, “the whole thing was first accidentally suggested by a Branch of Mistletoe!”

NOTE.—For all Juliet’s proud boast, I must tell you, in confidence, that I have my doubts as to the fact, (not in reference to myself, heaven knows that delusion cost me enough!) But, you must know, that by the time another winter had blanched the berries of the Mistletoe, she was never to be seen geologizing without Wilhelm participating in the advantage of such investigation. And, to end the story, before the weary sun again withdrew into moist Capricornus, she insured to her Pupil a constant opportunity of profit and instruction by accepting him as her husband. My Countess had settled a considerable sum upon them; and they had plenty of money, and opportunity sufficient for carrying into effect Juliet’s scheme of the

Geological Circuit of the Globe. But either Wilhelm's enthusiasm cooled, or Juliet's friendship was too warm; for though they make themselves evident in every Society, or plan, or place, of scientific note, such extended devotion to Science seems out of the question, as more than half their time is spent at Felstein, enlivening the castle by their disputations!

FINIS.

LONDON: PRINTED BY KNIGHT AND SON, UPPER HOLLOWAY.



